This second edition of “The Tourist”, which is specifically designed to showcase and amplify the responsible tourism credentials of Destination Gambia, has indeed added a new meaning to our efforts to inform and educate the general public including the diverse stakeholders of Gambia Tourism, about the myriad of initiatives and interventions of the GTBoard and tourism stakeholders in our quest to promote and mainstream responsible tourism. In the main, this edition projects andcatalogues the various efforts and interventions both past and present geared towards mainstreaming Responsible Tourism with a view to making tourism more people centred, pro-poor and quality in product development.

What qualifies as responsible tourism credentials may be numerous and varied, but in essence, they all contribute to ensuring that the social, economic and environmental issues affecting tourism are judiciously harmonized for the benefit of both the guests and their hosts, in a destination such as The Gambia, where tourism is given pride of place and seeks to foster the values of healthy, ethical behavior, buttressed by a web of international partnerships and cooperation.

Our policy encourages tourists and locals to become more responsive to one another’s needs, thereby making them more responsible in their actions in relation to the socio-economic and environmental implications of tourism.

In a nutshell, Gambia Tourism in its current shape and form seeks to minimize the negative and promoting the positive impacts of tourism. In this vein, diversification of tourism products, injecting innovation in product development, ensuring high standards of quality and encouraging the geographic spread of tourism to increase its impact become imperative.

Happy and fruitful reading!!

Abdoullie Hydara
Director General
IN FOCUS:

THE GAMBIA’S RESPONSIBLE TOURISM (RT) CREDENTIALS

Tourism potential as a tool for development is acknowledged in the development agenda of both developing and developed parts of the world. This multifaceted industry heavily makes use of nature, culture, society, heritage and environment for its growth and development. With high linkage effects, tourism cuts across the economies, society and environment creating both positive and negative impacts. How to minimise the negative impacts and maximise the positive is the major question being addressed by policy makers, planners and administrators all over the world.

Responsible Tourism is about “making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit.” Responsible Tourism requires that operators, hosts, governments, local people and tourists take responsibility, take action to make tourism more sustainable.

World Travel Market – World Responsible Tourism Day (WTMWRTD)

The World Travel Market has adopted the Cape Town Declaration’s definition of Responsible Tourism for its World Responsible Tourism Day which encourages the industry to take responsibility for making tourism more sustainable and demonstrates their responsibility.

According to Dr. Harold Goodwin, Responsible Tourism is not the same thing as sustainable tourism. Sustainability is the goal, a goal which can only be achieved by people taking responsibility, together with others, to achieve it. Responsible Tourism is about taking responsibility for making tourism sustainable. It is about what people do to address the many specific challenges we face.

The Gambia won 6 accolades from the WTM Responsible Tourism Awards:

- Adama Bah (the author of this article): 2004 Winner: Best for Personal contribution to RT
- Mikalivasta: 2004 Winner: Highly commended and Best for poverty reduction
- ASSET – 2003 Winner: Best for Poverty reduction
- Gambia is Good: 2008 Winner: Best for poverty reduction
- Footsteps 2014 Silver Award: Best for resource management
- Sandele Lodge 2015: Best for resource management

Introduction

Tourism is about taking responsibility for making tourism more sustainable, it is about what people do to deal with issues of economic, social and environmental responsibility.

Tour Operators. Other tour operators from other countries, such as the Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, the Caribbean and Corsica in France, were also highly commended. The project became the catalyst that linked the Responsible Tourism Network to The Gambia.

World Travel Market – World Responsible Tourism Day (WTMWRTD)

The World Travel Market has adopted the Cape Town Declaration’s definition of Responsible Tourism for its World Responsible Tourism Day which encourages the industry to take responsibility for making tourism more sustainable and demonstrates their responsibility. The highlight of the event was the Responsible Tourism Award Ceremony, where countries, companies and individuals are awarded. The award wants to celebrate the shining stars of responsible tourism – the individuals, organisations and destinations working innovatively with local cultures, communities and biodiversity.

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Catalyst to RT in the Gambia

Prior to the Cape Town Conference, an innovative approach was taken to address the situation of the informal sector through a DfID Tourism Challenge Fund (TCF) funded project. The project was about improving the situation of Small (Micro) enterprises along the Tourism Development Areas of Koni and Senegambia. They were mainly the Fruit Vendors, the Juice Pressers, the Craft Market vendors and the Tourists Taxi Drivers. The difficult and complex issue of “bumpsters” was also to be looked at. A number of objectives and activities were established to make tourism more “pro-poor” and specifically to increase access of the informal sector to market opportunities in tourism. This project became the catalyst that linked the Responsible Tourism Network to The Gambia.

RT Partnership

The Responsible Tourism Partnership (RTP) replaced the 2000-2003 project steering group that was managing the DfID funded project described earlier. It was established by the then Gambia Tourism Authority for stakeholders representing the three main Associations, of Juice Pressers, Taxi Drivers and Craft Markets, and the Federation of Tour Operators representing UK based Tour Operators. Other tour operators from other countries were also invited to these meetings. The RTP was chaired by the Minister of Tourism and Culture represented mostly by His Permanent Secretary.

In 2004 the policy was launched. The policy document served as a guideline for implementing Responsible Tourism in the Gambia. In the executive summary of the policy it is stated: This policy is a call to action in order to combat some of the inequities and negative impacts of tourism. It comes at a time when The Gambia has a desperate need to re-launch its image of being a cheap winter sun destination that is dominated by the mass tourist market. At the same time elements such as sex tourism, hassle and environmental degradation need to be tackled. This policy is addressed to the whole of the tourism industry, government and the Gambia Tourism Authority. It identifies objectives to achieve responsible marketing of the destination and to deal with issues of economic, social and environmental responsibility.

MBOKA

In November 2006, ASSETof The Gambia and CMNTs of Senegal, supported by tourism stakeholders and the governments of The Gambia and Senegal, signed an MOU to promote Responsible Tourism Development in Senegal and The Gambia. This initiative was conceived of by addressing the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental responsibility and by engaging in product development and marketing. Almost one year after signing the MOU in Dakar, Mboa 2007 helped make this pledge reality by promoting and showcasing the Senegambian tourism industry at a fair first held in Dakar on the 31st October, 2007. Unfortunately, the fair stopped temporarily in 2011. There are plans to start the Event in Senegal in November 2016 and in The Gambia in January 2017.

ROOTS Excursion Project

The Roots excursion has always been one of the most popular excursions taken up by the UK tourism market. In 2008, however, its popularity was dwindling and there was serious concern by tour operators that the constant hassle tourists were experiencing from locals, was putting the excursion at risk. Negative feedback from the tourists grew to such an extent that the tour operators were considering removing the excursion from their portfolio. One of the principle catalysts for the hassle was that local communities were receiving only marginal financial benefits from the excursion, mostly through donations and the sale of souvenirs.

Between 2008-2011 the project got funding from the Travel Foundation for community empowerment of the villages of Jufureh and Albreda, for the creation of a community development fund and to improving the visitor experience.

RT CAPACITY BUILDING

Through links with Dr. Harold Goodwin, and the International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT) first established at the University of Greenwich during 1998, the Gambia Tourism Authority (GTA) was given the opportunity to create a responsible tourism capacity building programme for its tourism industry. It was a 3 year programme to train tourism staff at the post graduate level.

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work and now the IORT-West Africa was formed. The IORT-West Africa is an integral part of an international network of responsible tourism proponents, running a wide range of programmes, courses, workshops and conferences to help stakeholders keep abreast of responsible tourism issues.

From 2012 IORT-West Africa linked up with the University of The Gambia and IORT based at Leeds Beckett to apply for scholarships in MSc Responsible Tourism Management from the Commonwealth for West African students. The scholarships were acquired and 21 West Africans took part in this course. In October 2017 IORT-West Africa will be organizing the first West African Responsible Tourism Seminar in Abuja.

Switch Off, Save Big - Hotel Project

A hotel environmental project was initiated from 2011 to 2013 with funding from the Travel Foundation supported by Thomas Cook. The project covered 7 hotels: Dunes Resort, Kairaba Beach Hotel, Kombo Beach Hotel, Lacco Atlantic Hotel, Ocean Bay, Senegambia Hotel and Sunset Beach Hotel. The Programme was focused on helping hotels and other accommodations minimize their environmental impact ‘resource efficiency’ in other words reducing their use of water and energy and also minimising the waste they produce.

In conclusion

The Gambia could be a lead Responsible Tourism destination in the world competing with South Africa (specifically Cape Town) and Kanaba in India who are effectively using RT in the marketing of their destinations. However, the main issue is we need the right Responsible Tourism marketing strategies to achieve such a goal. We have all the ingredients to prepare us for such a challenge but what is left is for the GTB to take the lead by bringing together the relevant stakeholders and start to build the right steps to take. It is like cooking your “Benachin”, you can have all the ingredients you need and a recipe at hand but if you don’t start the cooking process those ingredients will remain separate. With the Gambia what we now have is the ingredients and a recipe, we have to start cooking in order to plate and taste that “Benachin”.

I hope this article will be an inspiration to you; you immediately are approached by someone who wouldn’t offer a smile after digesting a mouth full of Benachin’, Responsible Tourism has the potential to have a similar impact with our Smiling Coast.

By Adama Bah, Chairman of Board of Directors, Institute of Travel and Tourism of The Gambia.

The word ‘bumerter’ is perhaps the most widely used word among visitors and tourists to the Smiling Coast. It is also an accepted fact that bumerterers pose a direct threat to the good image of Destination Gambia, more so in this era of globalization and the internet age. There exist a variety of platforms, than ever before, that visitors can use and share their negative experiences with potential travelers such as social networking sites (Facebook), tourism blogs and online newspapers with global reach and scope.

According to one travel writer and a frequent visitor to the Smiling Coast “there is this constantly annoying matter called bumerterers. Everywhere you go without a Gambian accompanying you, you immediately are approached by young men, who appear to be friendly, but in the end are looking for personal gain and ask for money. If you politely say you wish to walk in peace along the beach, some of them persist and when you resist, they even get aggressive. This is of course discouraging for most visitors, although some more naive ones may even like the attention they seem to get.”

Invariably, the Tourism Development Master Plan study paid great attention to this menace, and following a very authoritative review and study of this phenomenon, concluded that “the bumerter problem is an enigma. If it should assume a human face, it will be one with many faces, contradictory at one point, complex at every point and difficult to fathom or comprehend. Bumerterers take their role seriously. The assiduity, steadfastness and commitment which they display in staking out the beaches from sunrise to sunset on a daily basis indicate that they display in staking out the beaches from sunrise to sunset on a daily basis indicates an inner resourcefulness which can be tapped if used wisely. This is of course discouraging for most visitors, as some of them persist and when you resist, they even get aggressive.”

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The overall result is a crop of seasoned and dedicated tourist guides who are willing and able to serve as cultural brokers and plug their trade as freelance tourist guides in the Tourism Development Area and other areas frequented by tourists. It must however, be pointed out that though most tourists to the Gambia are repeat visitors, 48% GTBoard Tourism Statistics Report 2016 and come through pre-packaged tours (87% of holiday makers – Tourism Development Master Plan Study). does not augur well for the Official Tourist Guides. However, feedback from both tourists and tourism stakeholders about the overall operations and services offered by the guides continue to be mixed. This is partly due to the fact that some of the guides were absorbed from the beach and as such the stigma of “tourist tag” continues to hang on some of them.

According to a leading tourism stakeholder, this has posed serious challenges in the beginning as some of the guides were wrongly perceived by the tourists. This, however, has changed and the stakeholders are trying to make sure that the guides are properly trained. The National Tourist Guide Scheme (NTGS) was envisaged that the Official Tourist Guides would complement government efforts in education, youth and sports, and supporting the Tourism Development Master Plan Study). does not augur well for the Official Tourist Guides. However, feedback from both tourism stakeholders and tourists about the overall operations and services offered by the guides continue to be mixed. This is partly due to the fact that some of the guides were absorbed from the beach and as such the stigma of “tourist tag” continues to hang on some of them.

TOWARDS A MORE INNOVATIVE CRAFT INDUSTRY

Toucan is a major contributor to the Gambian economy. And those in the craft sector contribute substantially to the tourism industry through the production and sale of arts and crafts objects for tourists who buy them as souvenirs. However, in recent years, the craft sector has been facing challenges in terms of safety and standards of operational efficiency.

Achievements of the Scheme

In addition to the positive comments from satisfied tourists, the official tourist guides have registered positive gains as follows:

• Formation of a functional association to serve the interest and welfare of the scheme.
• Effective participation in national development endeavors such as beach cleansing exercise, and complimenting government efforts in education, youth and sports, and supporting the Tourism Development Master Plan Study).
• Affiliation with World Federation of Tourism Guides. • Affiliation with the National Youth Council.
• Membership of Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism (ASEET).
• Creation of a trust fund to cater to the welfare of their late colleagues.
• Effective collaboration with the GTBoard.

Constraints

In the absence of funding, notwithstanding, the Nationa lTourist Guide Scheme is also encountering certain constraints ranging from stigmatization, lack of recognition by the industry, and lack of professionalism “guides” in the industry (piracy) to lack of recognition in certain hospitality outfits.

Conclusion

The Gambia Tourism Board’s Task Force has been working tirelessly to ensure that the tourism industry is taken to the next level. The Tourism and Culture rolled out a training project tagged ‘Enhancing the capacities of craft producers to make them more innovative in production and product packaging’. In a bid to build the capacity and encourage innovation among craft producers in the tourism industry, Gambia Tourism Board (GTBoard) in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture rolled out a training project tagged ‘Enhancing the capacities of craft producers to make them more innovative in production and product packaging’. The training combined theoretical learning of innovative techniques to be able to produce wood crafts from creative design concepts. At the end of the training, the 5 trainers were equipped with the requisite skills and techniques to be able to produce wood carving resources, identify and select a range of wood crafts in different styles, as well as produce innovative wood crafts. The participants were also exposed to workplace safety procedures, and setting up safe work space.

• TRAINING OF TRAINEES IN WOOD CARVING

This component attracted five (5) participants from Mali, Gambia and Senegal and kicked off on the 25th June – 17th May 2016. The training was conducted by the master trainer Mr. Eruhiss Philip Alcorto, from Ghana. The training combined theoretical learning and practical demonstrations to give the participants the knowledge and skills of applying innovative techniques to be able to produce wood crafts from creative design concepts. The training was conducted by the master trainer Mr. Eruhiss Philip Alcorto, from Ghana. The training combined theoretical learning and practical demonstrations to give the participants the knowledge and skills of applying innovative techniques to be able to produce wood crafts from creative design concepts.

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• SYNTAX OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

All training activities were carried out simultaneously in line with the project implementation matrix and the synopsis of the programme delivery of the various components as follows:

By Lamin Saho
Former Coordinator - Tourist Guide Scheme Project.
quality control. The training was led by Mr. F. Owusu, the Master Trainer.

• TRAINING OF TRAINNERS IN VISUAL ARTS
  – PAINTING
  This component was one of the key intervention areas and attracted five participants and featured trainees from The Gambia, Senegal and Mali. The Master Trainer was the award-winning Gambian artist, Mr. Ngou Touray. The objective revolved around the need to expose participants to various painting techniques and ideas so as to become more innovative in design and product presentation. The course methodology focused on practical sessions and demonstrations and at the end of the training the 5 participants were able to develop proficiency with a range of painting techniques, create finished paintings using a mix of techniques.

• TRAINING OF TRAINNERS IN THRASH ARTS
  This training attracted five participants from The Gambia, Senegal and Mali. Given the approach of the training, emphasis was placed on practical work and group demonstrations. The overall objective was to expose participants to a range of tried and tested methods of creating craft items out of trash materials. At the end of the training, all 5 participants were able to utilize various skills and techniques to produce artifacts from recycled materials.

• TRAINING OF TRAINNERS IN PRODUCT PACKAGING
  This training package was attended by all the 20 participants and the objective was to expose all the participants to the skills required to add extra creativity to the packaging of their handicraft products. The training methodology was centered on group demonstrations, lectures, and case studies. At the end of the training the 20 trainees were exposed to various methods and techniques in innovative product packaging.

Recommendations

It can be concluded that this is a laudable project that can and has through this instance increased the capacity of craft producers from various markets. The training of the trainers will expand the knowledge to many others, which is needed in the industries. To further consolidate the gains of this intervention, the following recommendations are professed:

• that a larger number of OIC member countries in Africa participate and that the duration is increased as the three-weeks training was very intense and short. It can also be observed from the last training module that these three countries are still lagging behind in labeling and branding component of product craftwork.

• that product packaging, labeling, and branding becomes a fully added component of such trainings. This training can go a long way in educating and protecting the craft ideas (copyright) and products of local craft men who often sell their items abroad. The project gained sub-regional recognition and was highly appreciated by craft market associations across the three countries and their governments.

• It is also recommended for a yearly 3-day workshops and exhibition to be organized with a view to bringing participants together to discuss pertinent matters in craft producing business and allow further networking to take place.

• In addition, it would also make a bigger difference if trainees could be availed the opportunity to undertake study tours to other countries in the subregion to further expose them to new techniques and also to network with like-minded professional colleagues in the context of follow up projects.

By Lamin Saho
COMCEC PROJECT COORDINATOR
FATOU BAYAI RAJI
ON RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The Gambia has made significant strides in Responsible Tourism. According to the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, 2002, “Responsible Tourism minimizes negative economic, environmental and social impacts, generates better economic benefits for the local people and makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage; to the maintenance of the world’s diversity.” In this exclusive interview, DPDC delves into the genesis of Responsible Tourism and the Gambia experience. The questions are designed such that the general reader will understand the basics of Responsible Tourism and how it is applied in the Gambia.

THE TOURIST: First of all for the benefit of our esteemed readers, could you kindly tell us who is Fatou Bayai Raji?

F.B. Raji. I am the Director for Product Development Investment and Culture at the Gambia Tourism Board, and have been working for the Gambia Tourism Board since its inception in 2001 but came in a year later 2002. I have been working through the ranks started as an officer till reached the position of a director. I have also acted as Director General twice one for a short while and the other for over two years.

THE TOURIST: What does the concept of Responsible Tourism entail and how has it fared in the Gambia?

F.B. Raji. Ah... Responsible Tourism is a policy that has been prepared by the Responsible Tourism Partnership (RTP) in the Gambia. It is a multi-stakeholder process, in which all the Stakeholders came together and decided that they will do tourism in a responsible manner, and have agreed to formulate the Responsible Tourism Policy. And this policy is a policy that is used in the Gambia, is the basis for all tourism activities destination Gambia.

THE TOURIST: How do you think we can mainstream Responsible Tourism Development in the Gambia?

F.B. Raji. Well I think it is already mainstreamed, mainstreamed in the sense that it has been included in the Tourism Master Plan Development which is; the economic, the environment and the social aspects of every action that within the context of tourism. Whether we are developing a product, whether we are marketing it, whether we are looking at quality control everything that we do have to give consideration to the economic, the social and the environment dimensions within the framework of tourism development. And basically this is what we are doing in every aspect of tourism in the Gambia.

THE TOURIST: Are there any projects and or programmes that have been rolled out or in the pipeline to advance the cause of Responsible Tourism in Destination Gambia?

F.B. Raji. Since 2002 when the Responsible Tourism was put in place the Gambia Tourism Authority and now the Gambia Tourism Board has always been working in that direction. All the projects that we have done at the GBT Board up to date are all based on the principles of Responsible Tourism. In terms of Community based tourism, we have done the Ndemban Home Stay Project, Kartong and Juffureh (the information center/renew project) they are all based on Responsible Tourism Development.

THE TOURIST: What is your final word to our esteemed readers?

F.B. Raji. I want to say that in order to achieve those objectives, the basis of having Responsible Tourism is just to increase the benefits of Tourism to everybody, equity in the benefits whether you are from the big companies or the small businesses, or the individuals, the formal sector, the informal sector, whether you are in the urban or rural areas. It is our intention to make sure that those benefits are shared equally but in order for us to achieve that we have to work together with the industry and all the Stakeholders to agree on best practices, to agree on all the things that we believe will bring benefits to everybody not to individuals but also a Tourism that will look at the environment, consider the environment as an important source of resources and to make sure that the environment is not destroyed because Tourism depends on the environment.

We also need to work together with the general public and the tourists as well so that because of Tourism we don't break down our social norms. This is a society that has its social values and we don't expect tourists to come here and fout those values. Because we have moral values and we believe that if we work together with the guest and the host we would be able to achieve that mutual respect for each other's culture.

We also believe that by working together we should be able to achieve economic benefits. In as much as the tourist wants to enjoy and experience our country, we also as Gambia want to enjoy those experiences as well. Whether is the tourist or Gambian we think that responsible tourism should be able to provide good living for us the Gambians and also for the tourist that come, they should be able to enjoy coming to Gambia. But at the same time, we should also be able to enjoy living in the Gambia and is only through responsible tourism that this can be achieved.

So I think that working together with the communities with the people, with the institutions, whether they are formal or informal and agreeing to have specific standards and regulations as well as codes of conduct will help a great deal in maintaining sustainable and responsible tourism in the Gambia.

Fatou Beyai Raji?

Teemed readers could you kindly tell us who is Fatou Beyai Raji?

THE TOURIST: How do you think we can maintain sustainable and responsible tourism and how is it applied in the Gambia?

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F.B. Raji. I want to say that in order to achieve those objectives, the basis of having Responsible Tourism is just to increase the benefits of Tourism to everybody, equity in the benefits whether you are from the big companies or the small businesses, or the individuals, the formal sector, the informal sector, whether you are in the urban or rural areas. It is our intention to make sure that those benefits are shared equally but in order for us to achieve that we have to work together with the industry and all the Stakeholders to agree on best practices, to agree on all the things that we believe will bring benefits to everybody not to individuals but also a Tourism that will look at the environment, consider the environment as an important source of resources and to make sure that the environment is not destroyed because Tourism depends on the environment.

We also need to work together with the general public and the tourists as well so that because of Tourism we don't break down our social norms. This is a society that has its social values and we don't expect tourists to come here and fout those values. Because we have moral values and we believe that if we work together with the guest and the host we would be able to achieve that mutual respect for each other's culture.

We also believe that by working together we should be able to achieve economic benefits. In as much as the tourist wants to enjoy and experience our country, we also as Gambia want to enjoy those experiences as well. Whether is the tourist or Gambian we think that responsible tourism should be able to provide good living for us the Gambians and also for the tourist that come, they should be able to enjoy coming to Gambia. But at the same time, we should also be able to enjoy living in the Gambia and is only through responsible tourism that this can be achieved.

So I think that working together with the communities with the people, with the institutions, whether they are formal or informal and agreeing to have specific standards and regulations as well as codes of conduct will help a great deal in maintaining sustainable and responsible tourism in the Gambia.
Every May 1, Labour Day, the world remembers the plight of workers across the universe. In The Gambia, "THE SMILING COAST OF AFRICA", Labour Day is marked by activities such as a march pass, and a workers’ sports event called May Day Sports, which takes place at the Independence Stadium in Bakau. Last May 1, The Gambia Tourism Board, under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture (MoTC), joined other institutions in the country to celebrate this very important day. This year’s celebration started with a parade of workers led by the army band, and the usual speeches by labour representatives and government officials. The 2016 May Day Sport was successfully staged at the Independence Stadium in Bakau and the GT Board staff were well kitted out for the event as these pictures show. Please enjoy! Please see the eye catching pictures of GT Board Staff together with its parent Ministry of Tourism and Culture.

By Mamou Suwarneh
GT Board Asst. Marketing Officer
GTBOARD MAKES STRONG CASE FOR QUALITY PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Tourism has been the mainstay of the economy since Independence in 1965. The core product includes sea, sun and sand, but there has been increasing emphasis on eco-tourism, cultural tourism, community-based tourism ventures as well as the development of high and resort facilities. This strategy is two pronged and the central plank include the consolidation and development of the core beach product to offer high end products in the four and five star categories for the discerning leisure tourist and attracting high end tourists, while at the same time expanding the scope and geographic spread of tourism to offer niche products for eco minded tourists, cultural and adventure tourists thereby spreading the impact of tourism on the livelihood of all Gambians. This will be underpinned by high service standards to meet guests expectations.

1. Tourism as a dynamic industry is undergoing tremendous transformation in various fronts, most notably in the domain of product development and how this impinges on quality service delivery. As we are all aware, changes in lifestyle, technology, values are key driving forces impacting on tourism. Increasingly tourists are more knowledgeably, experienced, environmentally aware, discerning, independent and more quality and value for money conscious. Consequently there has been increasing demand for quality and good value holidays and new holiday ideas.

2. In recognition of this trend various policies have been articulated by the Gambia Government and existing frameworks reengineered in tandem with tourism stakeholders with a view to developing new products and mainstreaming quality in tourism. Invariably, various institutional arrangements and partnerships have been forged between public and private sector in the area of product development with the sole objective of creating tourism destinations that are not only interesting, exciting, but offering quality products to meet the changing dynamics of tourism.

3. Therefore, the objective of this presentation is to point out the success stories in institutional frameworks and partnerships in the context of quality product development.

4. The Gambia is a small country located in West Africa, with a population of 1.8 million. Tourism has been the mainstay of the economy since Independence in 1965. The core product includes sea, sun and sand, but there has been increasing emphasis on eco-tourism, cultural tourism, community-based tourism ventures as well as the development of high and resort facilities. This strategy is two pronged and the central plank include the consolidation and development of the core beach product to offer high end products in the four and five star categories for the discerning leisure tourist and attracting high end tourists, while at the same time expanding the scope and geographic spread of tourism to offer niche products for eco minded tourists, cultural and adventure tourists thereby spreading the impact of tourism on the livelihood of all Gambians. This will be underpinned by high service standards to meet guests expectations.

5. Given the cross cutting nature of tourism, and in line with best practice in tourism destination management, stakeholders of the tourism industry comprising the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Gambia Tourism Board, National Centre for Tourism and Culture, Gambia Tourism and Hospitality Institute as well as the Gambia Hotel Association and the Gambia Tourism and Travel Association and related agencies such as the Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency formulated the Tourism, Hospitality and Culture Strategy 2020. This strategy document has been designed to guide the tourism industry over a five year period from 2015 – 2020.

6. The core plank of this strategy is to ensure a more robust tourism development anchored on quality products and providing investment opportunities for the development of tourism in the context of partnership with all stakeholders, while at the same time boosting tourist arrivals to 500,000 by 2020.

7. In this context that a Memorandum of Association between the Gambia Tourism Board and Gambia Investment Export Promotion Agency (GIEPA) came in to effect. This partnership agreement was designed to foster cooperation and collaboration between these key institutions notably in the area of investment in tourism product development. One of the major fruits of this partnership was the Juffureh Revamp Project has been rolled out in partnership with the Gambia Tourism Board in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency. The investment forum showcased the investment opportunities in Tourism with the overriding objective of enhancing the product portfolio. The opportunities showcased ranged from water sport activities, marinas, eco-tourism, 4 and 5 star hotels and resorts, and economic opportunities to leverage the backward linkages with agriculture and horticulture to increase the multiplier effects of tourism.

8. Investment in the tourism sector is being facilitated by GIEPA in tandem with the Gambia Tourism Board. Investment laws and regulations are conducive to the product development of the tourism sector. The following are some of the attractive incentive packages for investment in the tourism sector.

   • Exemption on duties on capital equipment, spare parts, raw or semi-finished materials.
   • Exemption from withholding tax and tax on dividends for a period of five years.
   • Airport incentive on landing and handling fees.
   • Joint marketing activities with tour operators, hotels and airlines.
   • Those investing in 4 and 5 star hotels and high end complimentary facilities are eligible for complimentary free land if investing in the declared Tourism Development Area.
   • Exemption on customs duties on capital equipment, spare parts, raw or semi-finished materials.
   • Exemption from withholding tax and tax on dividends for a period of five years.

9. At the level of the GTBoard there exists a functional department for Product Development, Investment and Culture, the core mandate of which is to develop the product portfolio and suites of destination Gambias in collaboration with tourism partners and stakeholders institutions. This includes leasing with all relevant stakeholders at the destination level and at the level of the Tourism Think Tank under the aegis of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture to articulate and execute projects and programmes geared towards the development of quality products in Destination Gambia.

10. In line with this framework, the Juffureh Revamp Project has been rolled out in partnership with the National Centre for Arts and Culture. The purpose of this project is to augment the products for quality service delivery at the level of the heritage sites of Juffureh and Assanka – the Land of Kunta Kinte of Roots Fame.

11. A Craft Development Project to inject innovation in craft products jointly funded by COMMSC and the GTBoard has been rolled out. The objectives includes the boosting of craft products and at the same time to augment the quality and presentation of art work, and enhance visitor experiences.

12. Revisiting the classification scheme (of hotels) to include the service element and the streamlining of Gambia Tourism Regulations to enhance the operational efficiency and quality of service of various operators in tourism such as fruit juice sellers, tour guides, tourism taxi drivers, equipment hirees, ground tour operators etc. The overall objective is to boost the operational efficiency of these operators and service providers and ensure quality services and products.

13. Product development in terms of upgrading the bed stock of the industry is ongoing. This is being rolled out to upgrade selected 3 star hotels in to four star hotels. Currently, there exist the lion share of hotels classified under three stars, with just over 9 properties classified in the 4-5 star categories. This means that the available bed stock is deficient in terms of high quality products and services. The need to upgrade some 3 star hotels to 4 star category. The Ministry of Tourism and Culture in close collaboration with the GTBoard and the Tourism Stakeholders are drawing up plans to realize this project.

14. CONCLUSION

   It is worth pointing out that The Gambia has become a prime target for investors’ thanks mainly to its peaceful disposition and liberal economic environment. It has been reinforced by the Government’s effort to create a favorable environment for tourism to thrive and flourish. The Gambia tourism and hospitality industry has witnessed a transformation as more upscale properties and infrastructure have emerged to add the rich stock of tourism products in the Tourism Development Area and other areas frequented by tourists. These products have added value to the tourism industry while enhancing the profile of the Smiling Coast. I thank you all for your kind attention.

Story compiled by Lamin Saho
In today’s age, the need for a unified country brand cannot be overemphasized, given the myriad of challenges confronting nations in their quest to be differentiated from others and attract the right foreign direct investment, boost tourism and promote inclusive development through bilateral and multilateral networks. It is against this background that the government of The Gambia set up a committee to spearhead the development of a strong country master brand that will promote investment, commerce and tourism. This committee’s work culminated in the formation of a Brand Council which comprised experts from both government and the private sector, whose task was to craft a new country master brand that will serve to project the Unique Selling Point (USP) for The Gambia.

Furthermore, Africa Practice, an international consulting firm in partnership with Generation Alliance, a well acclaimed branding firm was contracted through funding from Gambia Growth and Competitiveness Project (GGCP) to develop a country Master brand for The Gambia. After many months of extensive work with the Brand Council and many other stakeholders, a new brand was crafted which has been successfully launched to the delight of all stakeholders in both the business community and the government.

**Our Vision**
The Gambia is the preferred destination in West Africa for new investment and diverse tourism opportunities.

**Our Mission**
To stimulate sustainable growth in The Gambia towards middle income economic status.

**Our Positioning Statement**
The Gambia is the preferred destination for investors looking for high-growth opportunities in West Africa and for tourists interested in accessible, friendly African experiences. We are looking to share our untapped potential.

**THE BRAND OBJECTIVE**
The overall objective of the new brand is to avail The Gambia the opportunity to attract high level investments into the country, boost tourism as well as enhance trade and commerce. In order to achieve the above, the brand seeks to help Gambia:
- Become a “middle-income economy”;
- Attract sustainable investment into targeted opportunities;
- Increase the volume and value of tourism, year on year;

**THE TARGET AUDIENCE**
In order to realize the objectives of the country brand, we need more targeted investment from the following:
- Local investors;
- Tourism investors, operators, and visitors;
- Like-minded international private sector investors;
- The Gambian Diaspora;
- Infrastructure developers / investors;
- International donors and aid agencies;
- Public-private partnerships;
- Social entrepreneurs.

Source: [http://www.thegambia.gm/](http://www.thegambia.gm/)

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**THE GAMBIA LAUNCHES COUNTRY BRAND**

- Unite all stakeholders around a single compelling proposition;
- Build international awareness and recognition of The Gambia as a regional hub and global leader in inclusive development;
- Create pride in the community and energize Gambia’s people to work together for a better future.

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**THE GAMBIA**
**THE SMILING COAST OF AFRICA**
"The traveler was active; he went strenuously in search of people, of adventure, of experience. The tourist is passive; he expects interesting things to happen to him. He goes "sight-seeing." Jethro Tours
BRITISH JOURNALIST WRITES WHY THE GAMBIA LIVES UP TO ITS ‘SMILING COAST’ TAG

Published on Tuesday, 29 November -0001

The excursion was a perfect way to experience the ‘real’ Gambia, from the sandy off-the-beat-en-track, the stop at a bustling fruit market or to meet ‘Uncle John’ at Yuna Village and taste his traditional palm tree wine – it’s not called ‘fire water’ for nothing.

Lunch was at Paradise Beach in Sanyang, with a snake charmer and African drummers as a nice little side order. It really is a stunning beach, with clean sand, palm trees and clear, blue water. The afternoon takes in the Tanje Village Museum which is set up exactly like a traditional tribal village.

Interesting little anecdotes were revealed as we walked around, such as drums are used as a peace sound between tribes, there are over 50 types of snake in the country and fruit from Boobah trees are good to treat diarrhoea. The final stop is the Tanje fishing port. This is an extraordinary place. The smell hits you first, then you are greeted with rows and rows of fish guts, you weave through dark, smelly shadows where fishing is being smoked on open fires before stepping out onto a huge chaotic beach.

We arrived at trading time so hundreds of locals were haggling and selling their daily catch. Kids as young as five struggle past you with huge buckets full to the brim with fish. Beautiful rainbow-coloured Viking-style fishing boats are lined up on the beach. And then out of nowhere a young man in a Manchester United shirt circa 1998 stops in his tracks and asks you what foot ball team you support. Then a cow walks past.

The final stop is the Tanje Village Museum which was set up exactly like a traditional tribal village. The staff were some of the friendliest (and happiest) people I have ever met, embodying the West African country’s ‘smiling coast’ tag with guests. The hotel’s non-human guests were a treat too. Monkeys were a common sight, especially around mealtimes, and don’t be shocked if a peacock comes and sits next to your sun lounger.

Matthew and I especially enjoyed the breakfast buffet, with practically every taste catered for, from continental to full cooked English breakfast. In the day, we feasted on fruit, bread, butter and tea in the hotel’s four restaurants and soaking up the (fierce) sun, a spa treatment or to try where some would be excused for giving up, So, having mottos as positive as this, in a country where some would be excused for giving up, makes it the kind of place I will return to, with plenty more crayons in hand. Denise Evans is a prominent journalist on the continent to full cooked English breakfast.

DID YOU KNOW?

The International Union of official Travel Organizations evolved in to the World Tourism Organization, and further evolved in to the UN Specialized Agency – United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
In quest to promote bird watching as a major niche in Gambian tourism portfolio, the GTBoard in conjunction with the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management, Bird Watchers Association and world renowned Birding organisations welcome you to the first ever birding festival slated to be held from the 21st - 25th October in the riverside village of Tendaba in the Lower River Region.

This festival is indeed very historic as it is the first time in the history of Gambian tourism that a festival of this nature is being rolled out under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture in conjunction with all the satellite institutions under its purview, most notably the GTBoard. This is therefore very significant in many fronts, but most notably in the collective endeavor to develop and promote tourism in all its manifestations.

Thanks to various concerted efforts in product development by the GTBoard in conjunction with all tourism stakeholders such as the Bird Watchers’ Association, the Smiling Coast is frequented by a diverse range of seasoned and experienced discerning tourists to indulge in their favorite passions - be it bird watching, water sports on the tranquil waters of The Majestic River Gambia, or dining and lodging in the trendy resorts and award winning eco-resorts and related tourist havens.

It is in this vein that the maiden International Bird Watching festival has been given a prominent spot in the tourism calendar of destination Gambia. It dovetails neatly with the lofty goals of the Tourism, Hospitality and Culture Strategy to improve the scope and geographic spread of tourism with a view to capturing high value tourists and generally increase demand and at the same time increases the socio-economic benefits of tourism as encapsulated in the newly unveiled economic development blueprint of The Gambia Government. This diversification is a gradual, but a significant shift in focus from our traditional package based tourism and a necessary foray into other rewarding niche tourism products. It is in this regard that this maiden edition of the International Birding Festival should be vigorously promoted, given the huge potential of Bird watching niche in our efforts to diversify our product range. In addition to the huge international exposure and marketing benefits of this initiative, it will offer many a tourist the opportunity to descend on the Gambia and experience the genuine warmth of the Smiling Coast.

According to the DG, GTBoard “this festival is the culmination of efforts undertaken both at the level of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the GTBoard to reposition destination Gambia, not just as a sea, sun and sand destination, but also as a haven for birding and related niche activities such as water sports, sports fishing, culinary, cultural tourism as well as eco-tourism”.

For his part the Honourable Minister of Tourism and Culture Benjamin Roberts underscored that “this festival could not have happened at a more appropriate time, given that the 2016/2017 tourist season is just around the corner and besides, he revealed that “some years ago destination Gambia under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture launched a new logo and brand image. This initiative seeks to underscore the need for destination Gambia to broaden its tourism appeal and diversify its products in the competitive world of tourism. It is therefore very gratifying to point out that this maiden International birding festival is a small step for the GTBoard, but a giant leap for destination Gambia. The Bird Festival will feature a range of birding activities including field trips, exhibitions and a farewell gala dinner.”

Story compiled by Lamin Saho
Former Director of Planning, Ministry of Tourism and Culture
He revealed that the Gambia Tourism (GT-Board) was set up by the Government to serve as a successor to the defunct Gambia Tourism Authority in 2011 following a World Bank supported institutional review. The GT-Board has five functional departments and the Director General outlined these as the Office of the Director General; Department of Marketing, Finance and Administration Department; Department of Product Development; Investment; and Tourism. The Department is responsible to respond to the core objectives of the GT-Board; the marketing of Destination Gambia as an exciting and interesting tourism attractions, and in support of this core mandate the GT-Board is also responsible for the overall quality of tourism in the country. The Director General further underscored the fact the Office of the Director General "is responsible for the overall quality of tourism in the country and ensuring that there is both strategic fit and departmental alignment of the Boards goals and objectives".

The Director General lamented the scourge of Ebola, which has slowed down the confidence march of Gambian tourism, but hastened to add that expectations are that the 2016/2017 winter season will kick off on a high note and the early commencement of the winter season with the arrival of the maiden Operation Flight justifies this optimism and that the Government “for creating the conducive environment for tourism to be re-bounced and regain its viability, and for according this vital industry full support at all times. The entire tourism industry also deserves commendation, including the local media for projecting the ‘good image of destination Gambia’. He added: ‘Our sincere gratitude also goes to our overseas partners and myriad of marketing representatives, spread across the breadth of the various source markets’. The Gambia’s strategy focuses on rebuilding confidence in tour operators and travel agents and working hand in glove with them to create maximum awareness of Destination Gambia in key markets and working towards reaching the consumer. In this vein the Director General disclosed that a range of marketing activities are to be rolled out as prelude to the commencement of the 2016/2017 season including FAM Trips involving travel agents of reputable and dependable international tour operators such as the TUI Group based in the Netherlands as well as the TML – a marketing firm based in the Russian Federation, in the quest to penetrate the lucrative Russian market.

On the various products of Destination Gambia, DG Hydara said: ‘we started tourism in the Gambia as a leisure destination promoting sea, sun and sand, but there is a gradual emphasis on other more lucrative forms of tourism such as cultural tourism, ecotourism and at the same time placing emphasis on niche tourism such as bird watching, adventure and nature based tourism as evidenced by the forthcoming International Bird Watching Festival slated to take place in Tendaba in a bid to boost community and nature based tourism’. This dovetails with our strategy of tourism product diversification in line with the Tourism, Culture and Hospitality Strategy, which has placed lot of emphasis on the need for tourism to be people centered and increasing the impacts.

There are obvious indicators pointing to the fact that Gambia Tourism is expanding in depth, scope and range of trendy and exciting tourism facilities, both in the Tourism Development Area and other areas frequented by tourists. The response of the GT-Board to this positive trend is to formulate robust regulatory mechanisms to ensure quality in tourism service delivery in a bid to meet the expectations of discerning and experienced ‘new tourists’ cognizant of the fact that the industry is dynamic and evolves very rapidly to keep pace with changes in style and the impact of robust technological trends. The GT-Board boss added: ‘Another vital response is to lure investment in 4 and 5 star hotel and local tour operators such as the TUI Group in the Russian Federation...'.

The fishing spots are accurately selected with a valuable knowledge of the fish and fishing grounds offering the anglers the rare opportunity to catch the ‘big one’. Fishing methods would take the form of live baiting, dead baiting, drifting trolling etc. The anglers would be provided with live or dead baits or artificial ones depending on their choice of fish predator.

The prize fish would include both fresh moving fish and domino fish. They include the famous Baracuda, the golden Snapper, the Barracouta, Cassava fish, Crayfish, Tarpon (also referred to as Silver Queen) and Tuna to name a few.

STORY COMPILED BY LAMIN SAHO