

# Eyes right towards Mozambique



Mozambique coastline

WHILE there is no really *new* destination, or a number one "hot" travel destination, there are some that have recently come more into focus than usual, for whatever the reason. Mozambique is one of them. While southern Africans may have been visiting the country for decades, only recently has the wider world taken stock, and writers are now adding it onto their annual lists of 'exotic destinations' or 'independent traveller choices'. Some tour operators this year reported that sales for voluntourism projects in Mozambique were also doing particularly well.

Mozambique was one of the three finalists in line to receive the New Frontiers Award at the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai in May this year, along with Vietnam and California, the latter becoming the outright winner. The award, organised by Reed

Travel Exhibitions, was given to the destination that has made an outstanding contribution to tourism development "in the face of overwhelming adversity".

The short listed destinations were chosen considering factors including their utilisation of aid packages, support from local and national government, tangible efforts of recovery and what organisers called "the sheer determination of the human spirit".

The panel of judges from travel industry professionals chose three out of 10 finalists, agreeing that Mozambique, one of the poorest countries in the world, was making all efforts to bolster tourism as it was seen to be a potential lifesaver for the country. Supported by grants from both the World Bank and USAID, the government said that revenue from international tourists rose to over \$144 million last year, a 50 per cent increase in just two years.

Euromonitor International's Travel and Tourism in Mozambique report in 2007 said that the government there had been making efforts to privatise part of its transport sector in order to be able to increase investments in infrastructure - main roads, rail, bridges and the privatisation of ports, terminals, airports and the national airline. There was low growth in the total number of travel accommodation outlets, but that any new investments in hotels would most likely cater for the higher income traveller.

However, Euromonitor stated that major factors deterring tourism to Mozambique were high crime rates and high airfares to the region.

Tourism Minister Fernando Sumbana Júnior announced at the Arabian Hotel Investment Conference 2008 in May that his country had four key areas of tourism development open to investors. The Anchor Investment Sites, a joint initiative of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Ministry of Tourism, is expected to generate over \$1 billion investment in the country's emerging tourism sector.

"We have identified specific areas in Mozambique which are available for immediate investment," Júnior said. "We did feasibility studies on those four sites, showing the character of the areas and the probabilities of the type of investments that can take place there. We want to encourage sustainable development, low density high yield projects."

IFC country manager for Mozambique Babatunde Onitiri said, "We are looking for larger scale developers and operators with a proven track record of similar developments in other emerging markets that subscribe to environmentally and socially sound development principles."

Interest materialised from Dubai and North Africa as a result of his AHIC attendance, and Júnior was also keen to reach other Gulf States. "Investors will have to prove they are going to be environmentally responsible and are going to build a project in an area where they have the required expertise," he said.

Dubai World Africa is planning to invest \$200 million in the Bilene Hotel, a luxury beach resort, golf estate and eco development along four kilometres of prime beachfront in Mozambique. Lying north of Maputo, the resort spans 1,000 ha and encompasses the Sao Martinho Lagoon, nature reserve and turtle breeding area.

The development will include the creation of an international competition standard golf course, a five star hotel as well as 500 golf course and beach villas and condos, watersport facilities and a diving centre. The resort will be served by its own airport, Bilene Praia. Dubai World Africa based in Cape Town was still in the initial stages of transactions with the Mozambique government. Dubai Ports World currently operates the Maputo container terminal at the port of Maputo.

IFA Hotels & Resorts, developers of premier integrated and mixed-use hotel and tourism resort projects and luxury leisure services with head offices in Kuwait, considers Africa a good market and was also looking towards Mozambique and other African countries. ■

by Cheryl Mandy

Mozambique Tourism is at WTM on stand AF4225 along with Gorongosa National Park and other exhibitors from that country.

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# Entrepreneur breathes life into game reserve

by Cheryl Mandy

**G**ORONGOSA National Park in central Mozambique, a neglected game reserve which had most of its wildlife wiped out during a 30 year civil war, is being restored.

An American eco philanthropist Greg Carr has turned away from commerce to devote his energy into this project. He formed the non profit Carr Foundation and joined forces with the Mozambique government to re-establish the Gorongosa's vast savannas, wetlands and wildlife population, at the same time assisting with the development of surrounding communities.

In January 2008 a 20 year contract was signed between the two to co-manage the park and develop the ecosystem for the benefit of all. The Foundation has pledged to inject about \$40 million over the next 30 years. This will cover development of the park's infrastructure, the training of anti poaching teams (illegal hunting still continues within the 4,000 sq km park), the establishment of a biological research centre, reforestation schemes and improving the lives of local people by creating employment, funding schools and health clinics and training local farmers in sustainable agriculture.

Gorongosa once supported some of the densest wildlife populations in Africa. By the end of the war in 1992 its large mammal numbers were reduced by as much as 95 per cent - buffalo herds that once reached 14,000 were whittled down to just 50 - as refugees as well as members of the political parties of Frelimo and Renamo, which made their headquarters in the park, moved into the area and plundered it to survive.

"What I am doing is not that unusual. Many people have a desire to save our planet's precious eco treasures," Carr told *TIN*. He is indeed among the growing breed of entrepreneurs wanting to preserve African wildlife and help its people help themselves, with little interest in commercial gain.

There's Wall Street fund manager Paul Tudor Jones in the Serengeti in Tanzania, who together with South African Luke Bailes turned a badly poached area to the north west of the country into a haven for wildlife and a luxury safari destination providing



Gorongosa antelope; (below) Carr

employment for more than 600 people (Singita Grumeti Reserves).

Jones also has a philanthropic venture in Zimbabwe called Pamushana Lodge, where the 130,000 acre Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve has been stocked with wildlife and is a breeding sanctuary for endangered species such as the black rhino. At the same time the Malilangwe Trust feeds some 25,000 children every day.

In Kenya's Great Rift Valley a private home called Oldonyo Laro plays a large part in protecting Kenya's wildlife and helping the local communities. The 60,000 acre ranch is available for a few weeks a year by invitation of the Danish owner, Jan Bonde Nielsen. A family or a group of up to 16 can to rent the entire estate for \$250,000 a week, much of which goes back into the community.

Asked why he chose to revive this park in particular, Carr said that he wanted to find a project that combined human development with biodiversity preservation and restoration. "Gorongosa Park was once the economic engine of central Mozambique and I think it can be again some day. I know that it can once again be world famous. I can't imagine any other project that would offer such an opportunity to achieve something meaningful."

Another aspect of the project Carr finds fulfilling is it is being operated jointly with the Mozambicans. "I like working with the people of this country," he said. There are currently 250,000 people who live in the four administrative districts that make up the park boundaries.

What is unique about the greater Gorongosa region is that it contains five of the nine large biological regions in Africa. There is a rainforest on the 1,862m Mount Gorongosa that is listed by biologists to be in the highest category of conservation urgency, and in the park itself there is open woodland and grassland savanna.

"Heading east toward the ocean we have mangroves and flooded grassland. The region doesn't just support biological diversity. It also supports rare and beautiful landscape features and larger ecosystem processes that are important, such as 'ecosystem services' (the park cleans air and water) and the park supports animal migrations which are themselves unique to this ecosystem in their exact characteristics," he said.

Carr believed it would take about 20 years to restore the park to its former glory. "We need many animal populations to regain their numbers and we think that will happen

naturally. Births have been high in recent years. We also need a long time to develop a tourism industry and to train local Mozambicans for all of the park positions."

"We also need a long time to work with the traditional communities that surround the park on their aspirations for development. For instance, all of the communities need schools, health clinics, better farms and more water," he said.

The biggest challenge in

implementing the project had been hiring the right people. "But I am very happy to say that we have assembled a fabulous management team in every area of our initiative," Carr added.

Asked if he was looking for other investors to get involved in the project, he said, "We are creating relationships with other donors, such as USAID, the Portuguese government, Kellogg Foundation. We also hope that

tourism and commercial agriculture will empower the ecosystem to generate support for itself."

"We hope that we can attract some tourism operators from the Middle East," said Carr.

Tourism facilities are still only for the adventurous traveller, but future plans include the development of a luxurious tented camp to which tourists can fly into by private aircraft. Later in the year the park will be opening the tendering process for some luxury lodges within the camp, and there will be more concessions available for investors shortly.

The nearest airport is Beira some three hours drive away. Accommodation at present is at Chitengo Safari Camp in Gorongosa National Park in nine comfortable double cabanas, each with twin beds or one double bed. Currently these are being refurbished. All have mosquito netting, en suite toilets and air conditioning. Costs for a double cabana is \$108 (low season) and \$120 (high season).

By 2009 the park will have a conference centre that seats 75 people as well as a new restaurant and kitchen catering for 150 people. A bar and restaurant serving authentic Mozambican meals features locally grown organic produce on the menu. ■

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