

\$156m plan to boost tourism in Ruaha, Selous

By [Zephania Ubwani](#)

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ARUSHA, Tanzania - The government announced a \$156m (Sh340bn) major plan to boost tourism in the southern circuit. The plan, which will be financed by the World Bank (WB), will involve upgrading of roads leading to the iconic tourist sites in the zone, including the Ruaha National Park and Rungwa and Selous game reserves.



Uf Rydin via [Wikimedia Commons](#) - Msenbe airstrip in Ruaha National Park, Tanzania

Under it, the local airlines would be encouraged to increase their flights to the Mbeya and Iringa airports currently being expanded. The huge swathe of land in the southern part of the country, where the largely virgin national park, game reserves, and other natural attractions are found, have airstrips. However, the minister did not say if dozens of airstrips and aerodromes in the zone will be included in the envisaged transport infrastructure development to be funded from the WB loan.

"We still have fewer visitors compared with the great attractions we have compared to many other countries," said the minister for Natural Resources and Tourism, Prof Jumanne Maghembe, when announcing measures to boost the sector.

He revealed this when inaugurating a Sh3.2bn exhibition hall constructed by the Arusha International Conference Centre (AICC) to complement its conference activities.

The minister said Tanzania received 1,250,000 tourists last year, noting that the figure sharply contrasted with the world famous tourist attractions the country has which ranges from wildlife parks, beaches, and archaeological sites.

A challenge to tap the potential of conference tourism

He challenged the AICC, a state run body under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation, to tap the potential of conference tourism which, according to him, generated \$670m (Sh1.4 trillion) for the economy last year.

Maghembe promised that the government would give every necessary support to the centre to secure an affordable land in Dodoma to enable it to construct a convention centre in the envisaged capital. The minister revealed this when responding to an appeal by the chairman of the AICC board of directors, Dr Ladislaus Komba, to secure an affordable plot for its investment in Dodoma because the one shown to them would cost a whopping Sh2.4bn.

"We are afraid we will reach a situation where land being sought for construction of buildings is more expensive than the investment structures," he said, noting that they have secured a 32-acre land.

AICC also plans to put up another convention centre in Iringa Region, which is slowly becoming a hub of tourism activities in the southern circuit. However, details of the proposed facility were not revealed.

The minister emphasised that Arusha would continue to remain a major gateway for tourists from overseas most of them using the city as a transit to visit the national parks and other sites in the north. However, he regretted that conference tourism has not been fully tapped in Tanzania due to lack of state-of-the-art conference facilities in the country and inadequate marketing overseas of the existing potential.

The minister took time to castigate dishonest tour operators who are behind a conning racket for tourists from abroad who have pre-paid their bookings. "These tourists pay for full packages in their respective countries but when they land here the tour agents are nowhere to be seen. Let us fight this," he fumed.

He vowed that the government would have no mercy on those behind the racket because by so doing they were tarnishing the good image of Tanzania. "I will not sleep until this mess is dealt with to its end and those responsible apprehended," Maghembe told scores of tourism sector stakeholders who attended the opening of the exhibition hall.

New facility targets major conferences and meetings

AICC managing director Elishilia Kaaya said the new facility has targeted major conferences and meetings hosted there with exhibitions.

Baptised Lake Nyasa Exhibition Hall, the facility can accommodate 2,000 people and 100 booths at one time. Social events and meetings would also be hosted in it. Its viability was put to test during yesterday's (20 July) inauguration which coincided with the opening of an exhibition on tourism and allied sectors.

AICC, a parastatal created in the 1970s, had lacked purpose-built exhibition halls despite hosting some of the largest international conferences ever since. Kaaya said this led to some cancellations of high profile meetings in the past. At times, some exhibitions have been squeezed into the open space in the middle of its three blocks or in the stalls erected in its parking yards.

Utility

AICC which was established in 1978 taking over the properties of the former East African Community (EAC) which broke in 1977. It is the leading landlord in Arusha. Besides, its landmark structure (conference centre), it has at least 650 residential units and recently built 48 apartments in town.

It is the leading conference venue in Tanzania owned by the government 00 percent but operating without receiving any

subsidies.

It has a total of 10 meeting rooms which cater for conferences, workshops, seminars, and committee meetings, with a seating capacity of 10 to 1,000 delegates. Most of these rooms are equipped with Simultaneous Interpretation Systems (SIS) which can handle up to 12 languages.

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