

# Sports tourism key to destination branding in 2010

 By [Dr Nikolaus Eberl](#)

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As 2009 is drawing to a close and the tourism industry is heaving a sigh of relief that one of the worst years in travel history is almost over, when - [as one analyst put it](#) - “consumer greed turned to consumer fear”, the forthcoming world cup year holds promising prospects for those who are at the forefront of sports tourism - a phenomenon which recently emerged as the clear front-runner at the 2009 World Travel Market (WTM) to guide the industry into a prosperous future.

## Figures from the Lions' Tour

Professor Tim Coles, who opened the 2009 Sport Tourism Conference, [concluded](#): “Sports tourism is the sleeping giant of the global travel and tourism industry. Worth an estimated US\$600 billion dollars - this is not a niche market but rather a significant part of the global market.”

Earlier this year, South Africa took a sizeable bite out of global sports tourism when it hosted the 2009 British & Irish Lions Tour. According to a study commissioned by SA Rugby, [the arrival of 37 000 overseas visitors generated](#) R1.47 billion in direct and indirect value to the travel and tourism industry, representing close to a tenth (8.95%) of South Africa's annual tourism GDP.

The latest destination to join the wave of sports tourism is Kenya. After being rocked by one of its worst spells in history, the tourism industry is struggling back to its feet courtesy of high profile visits by celebrities. Top track, tennis, motoring, basketball, soccer and even Hollywood stars have visited Kenya, mostly on charity missions, in recent times.

Local tourism stakeholders say celebrities have been a core part of the drive that has seen the industry emerge from the doldrums to register an impressive Sh36.6 billion (US\$490 000) in the first nine months of 2009.

## Global publicity

The tours have been receiving global publicity on news outlets such as CNN, Reuters, BBC, AFP, Xinhua and AP. One of the most publicised visits was that of Jamaican super sprinter Usain Bolt. Accompanied by former Olympic and world 110 hurdles record holder Colin Jackson, Bolt made the tour symbolic by adopting the world's fastest animal, a cheetah.

But his visit was just the climax of a spell that has seen other global icons tour the country since June 2008. It started with the tour of England and West Ham FC goalkeeper Robert Green, who spent his holiday in Kenya and Tanzania and helped raise more than Sh2.3 million for the African Medical and Research Foundation (Amref).

Green's stint in Kenya saw him work with Amref's staff to speak on HIV/Aids, health, and peace in Dagoretti and Kibera slums in Nairobi. The main focus of his stint in Kenya was the Amref Football Tournament for Peace, set up following the post-election violence. In the same month, Inter Milan and Cameroon top striker Samuel Eto'o visited Kenya on a charity mission.

## Hosting the world champions

Then came American tennis superstar Serena Williams, the current World Number One, on a three-day charity tour, opening a secondary school named after her in Matooni, followed by Renault Formula One driver Fernando Alonso who celebrated his New Year Holiday in Malindi with his family.

The two-time Formula One world champion's Kenyan holiday got more publicity after his private jet hit a wall at the Malindi Airport terminal, forcing him to cancel his journey back to Italy.

After motoring, a team comprising retired Brazilian football internationals — among them world cup winners — toured Kenya on a charity mission. The 16-member team was led by former Bayern Munich star Paulo Sergio, ex-Barcelona superstar Giovanni Silva, defender Ze Carlos and midfielder Ailton dos Santos.

[Tourism minister Najib Balala](#) said the visits by celebrities have been the ministry's initiative. "Promoting sports tourism is one of the new tourism products that the ministry is undertaking. Given that Kenya is renowned globally as a sports powerhouse, this gives us an edge in as far as attracting sports celebrities to Kenya is concerned."

He said the Brazilian soccer team was conducted on a tour of the Masai Mara by the ministry. "These visits have contributed to the recovery of the industry. After experiencing the Kenyan tourist products, the celebrities serve as our goodwill ambassadors back home," says Balala.

## Goodwill brand ambassadors

Jake Grieves-Cook, the chairman of the Kenya Tourist Board, [added](#) that the visits have given Kenya a massive boost in a critical period. "They indicate that we are getting back to normal and that we have rapidly improved. Above all, it is greatly enhancing our image as a leading destination in Africa."

Grieves-Cook said the visits had wiped out fears among tourists that Kenya was unsafe, and opened room for the growth of the industry. "It is not a surprise that you will see these personalities coming back here on holiday with their families. Usain adopted a cheetah, which he will come back to check."

In the end, the key to Kenya's success was taking sports tourism to the next level, by adding causal branding and converting visiting sports stars to brand advocates for destination Kenya.

Given Africa's massive potential for promoting social causes, Kenya's success formula is possibly the most pertinent opportunity for continental destinations that wish to shift the global 2010 spotlight to their very own doorstep.

## ABOUT DR NIKOLAUS EBERL

Dr Nikolaus Eberl is the author of *BrandOvation™: How Germany won the World Cup of Nation Branding and The Hero's Journey: Building a Nation of World Champions*. He headed the Net Promoter Scorecard research project on SA's destination branding success story during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, co-authored the World Cup Brand Ambassador Program 'Welcome 2010' and was chairperson of the inaugural 2010 FAN World Cup. Email [nikolaus@brandovation.com](mailto:nikolaus@brandovation.com) and follow [@nikolauseberl](#).

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