

For immediate release

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KENYA WILDLIFE SERVICE SETS DATE FOR NEW PARK ENTRY FEES

It will cost slightly more to visit some of the government-owned parks and reserves from January 1 2009.

The Board of Trustees reclassified Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) managed parks and adjusted their entry tariffs in a Legal Notice Number 404 published on 26 November 2007. The new rates were to be effected from July 1, 2008 but tourism industry players sought a postponement.

At the same time, Sterling pounds and Euros will be accepted as other currencies of payment besides the US dollar and Kenyan shilling, in response to requests from international tourists.

The increment in rates has largely been driven by the high cost of wildlife conservation and the need for a pricing strategy that reflects the true value of our compelling tourism products.

KWS continues to invest heavily in infrastructure, upgrading of facilities and high quality science led park management to enhance visitor experience. The recent branding of 15 parks is part of this investment.

The new pricing is based on market segmentation and regional pricing levels. The segmentation of prices aims to disperse tourists to less visited parks in the Western Circuit, especially Ndere Island in

Lake Victoria, Ruma National Park in Homa Bay, Kakamega Forest National Reserve and Mt Elgon National Park.

Meanwhile, citizens of Burundi and Rwanda will be treated like other East African Community members who pay the same heavily subsidized rates like Kenyan citizens. Kenyan citizen tourists enjoy similar treatment in Tanzanian and Ugandan parks. This is part of the process of amalgamating the East African region into a more diverse but single tourist destination.

Background

Roads and bridges in most parks have been improved at a cost of Sh45 million and airstrips upgraded at a cost of Sh55 million in Meru (Mulika, Kinna, Masanduku) and Lake Nakuru (Naishi) National parks. KWS plans to spend a further Sh1 billion in the next two years on improving roads, bridges and airstrips in national parks and reserves across the country.

Opening up of the domestic airspace is one of the key cogs in a drive to realise Kenya's target of 5 million tourists per year by 2012. Already, KWS is planning to build airstrips in Ruma National Park (Homa Bay) and Mt Elgon National Park near Kitale Town. In the near future, more airstrips will be upgraded at Voi in Tsavo East National Park, Kamboyo in Tsavo West National Park and Mweiga in the Aberdare National Park. Each region will have an aircraft for patrols and other conservation activities.

The parks have been re-classified and priced accordingly into various categories, including Premium (Amboseli, Lake Nakuru); Urban Safari (Nairobi); Wilderness (Aberdares, Tsavo East, Tsavo West, Meru, Chyullu Hills and Kora); Mountain (Mt Kenya); Scenic and Special Interest (Hells Gate, Mt Elgon, Shimba, Shimba Hills, Arabuko Sokoke Forest, Tana Primate, Kakamega Forest); Marine (Kisite Mpunguti, Kiunga, Watamu, Mombasa, Malindi); Sanctuaries (Nairobi Animal Orphanage, Kisumu Impala Sanctuary and Nairobi Safari Walk).

Entry into the premium parks category will cost foreign tourists US\$60, up from the current US\$40. Others like Nairobi National Park will remain at the current rate of US\$40. Scenic and special interest parks like Hells Gate, Shimba Hills, Arabuko, Ndere, Kakamega Forest will cost US\$20 to encourage high visitor turnover.

Kenya has the best tourist products and infrastructure in East Africa to deserve the tag the true safari destination of the 'Big Five' yet remains the cheapest destination. For instance, Serengeti in Tanzania charges US\$60 while Maasai Mara charges US\$40. Tourists are charged US\$100 for a minimum of five days to climb Mt Kilimanjaro while Mt Kenya requires a tourist to pay US\$20 for a minimum of three days yet it is more challenging. On the other hand, Rwanda charges US\$500 per person in a group of minimum of eight people for an honour yet Kenya charges a flat rate of US\$40 for all it offers.

Special lower student rates will apply for individuals from recognised secondary, government or private college or university

aged below 23 years visiting parks for purposes of learning about conservation through a documented and organised arrangement with that institution. KWS will require a minimum of two weeks notice in order to issue written authorisation for student rates. This special arrangement excludes students on personally arranged holidays.

The new tariffs were arrived at after consultations involving various key stakeholders in 2006, including the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Kenya Association of Air Operators (KAAO), Kenya Tourism Federation (KTF), Kenya Tourist Board (KTB), Kenya Association of Tour Operators and the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers (KAHC).

As articulated in Vision 2030, the government has identified the tourism sector as the key driver of Kenya's economy. KWS manages and conserves wildlife, which accounts for 75 per cent of the tourism product. KWS has, therefore, embarked on a rigorous programme to raise the profile of parks to world class standards. The success of these programmes depends on the enhancement of revenue collection to supplement government resources. Several activities continue to be carried out, including the re-branding of the parks, improvement of infrastructure, capacity building for scientific management of the parks and various schemes to improve staff motivation and productivity. We have also identified sites for investment in lodges and hotels to increase tourists' accommodation in the parks.

In order to cushion wildlife conservation activities from effects of fluctuations in revenue collection, as in the case following the election violence, KWS is setting up an Endowment Fund.

We would like to assure the public and stakeholders of our commitment to further investment in the improvement of services and products to enhance Kenya's global position as a tourism destination.

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Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) is a State corporation established by an Act of Parliament, CAP 376, with the mandate to conserve and manage wildlife conservation in Kenya. It also has the sole jurisdiction over 26 national parks and oversight role in the management of 33 national reserves and private sanctuaries.