

Conference tourism in Kenya : towards tourism product development, diversification and extension

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Abstract: Kenya is predominantly a nature-based tourism destination with wildlife (concentrated in the southern part of the country) and beaches (along the Indian Ocean) accounting for over 85% of the international tourists visiting the country. Other attractions are based on the physical landscape of the country and the culture of the people. However, the emergence and constant growth of MICE travelers on the demand-side have shifted the perceptions on tourism marketing globally. Unfortunately, the full potential of conference tourism has not been exploited locally. The development, marketing and promotion of conference tourism in Kenya have been disparate. This has been entrenched further by the lack of a co-ordinated, targeted effort to market conference tourism in global markets. This paper seeks to highlight and assess venues for the development of conference tourism in Kenya. It also seeks to isolate strategies for harnessing even greater potential of conference tourism in Kenya. The paper acknowledges the emergence of M.I.C.E tourism as an alternative tourism strategy of choice for Kenya's tourism diversification and development strategies. The paper recommends that properly structured foundational activities need to be put in place towards building a strong destination-based 'Conference tourism' brand. These activities would include the establishment of a conference bidding team composed of the major stakeholders in the meetings industry. Further, the establishment of a fully-fledged and government supported conventional bureau would be the best intervention in the promotion of conference tourism in Kenya. By de-centralizing tourism promotion and marketing, the government would essentially harness the advantages related to outsourcing. By combining, sharing and expanding core competencies, these networks enhance K.T.B.'s efforts of efficiently marketing Kenya's tourism sector drastically