

Heritage Tourism: Sustainability and Capacity Building in Northwestern Tanzania

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During August of 2009, I traveled to northwestern Tanzania with two students, Rachel Iannelli and Malia Billman, to conduct preliminary research into the capacity of institutions in Kagera Region to sustain heritage tourism. This research had four primary components: 1) investigation into local capacity to undertake and sustain heritage tourism in partnership with American tour companies; 2) inquiry into the attitudes and receptivity of American tour companies to expand their vision and itineraries to include a well designed and organized heritage tourism in northwestern Tanzania; 3) perspective on the attitudes of foreign tourists, mostly Americans and Europeans, about heritage themes and destinations of interest, including those visited in Kagera Region; and 4) development of local capacity to sustain heritage destinations of significant global interest, regardless of local infrastructural development in the local tour industry.

These multiple objectives were funded by a CIBER grant from the Business School at the University of Florida. Rachel Iannelli and Malia Billman constructed a survey instrument to plumb the interests of American companies in heritage destinations that differ from the trite Masai village experience or the Spice Tour in Zanzibar. Their chief finding was that American company representatives are very suspicious of any inquiries, rebuffing most discussions, and preferring to operate within the limitations that have constrained the development of a more robust heritage tourism in East Africa. While in Bukoba, Malia Billman worked inside the only significant local tour company in the region, to better understand the connections that this company had with American counterparts and other international connections. In addition, Rachel and Malia participated in a number of cultural and heritage tours conducted by this local company to assess tourists'



reactions to the effectiveness of the tours as well as assess the historical accuracy of information discussed by guides during the tours.

The results of these investigations were both informative and provide clear guideposts for future development of heritage tours by foreign companies into the region. Our preliminary findings suggest that the local tour company pays relatively little attention to the evaluations that its clients complete after each tour, contributing to repeated mistakes and numerous, easily rectified complaints. This finding suggests that mechanisms for self-assessment and improvement do not meet international standards for handling high-end boutique tourism with well-educated clients holding high expectations for good value in destinations. Another important finding is that the managerial capacity for interaction with and delivery of services to international clients, e.g., American and European owned tour

companies, is not adequate to meet international standards in terms of local transport, timely organization, and sufficient background information. This suggests that opportunities exist for other tour companies—local and foreign—to enter into partnerships to fill a special need in this sector.

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