

Zim on the mend as a tourist destination?

Victoria Falls welcomes US, Japan, German travel ban lifts, bullish on business upturn.



As Zimbabwe slowly but surely returns to the international fold, demonstrated by lifting of travel warnings of Zimbabwe by the US, Japanese and German governments this month, other countries are expected to follow suit, says a representative of the destination marketing campaign www.GoToVictoriaFalls.com.

Germany's ambassador to Zimbabwe Albrecht Cronze said the prevailing situation in Zimbabwe no longer justified the travel warnings.

The Australian Embassy in Harare has recommended to its home Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Canberra that Victoria Falls be taken out of its travel advisory against Zimbabwe, and it is hoped that they too will lift the entire travel warning.

Ross Kennedy, spokesman of GoToVictoriaFalls.com said as this happened, Victoria Falls would “start to tap into pent-up demand from the UK, EU and other markets” which were holding back from travel to Zimbabwe. He added that Victoria Falls expected an upturn in arrivals towards year-end.

“Whilst it's clear that the global financial crisis has certainly taken its toll on regional tourism and therefore done some damage to arrivals in Victoria Falls between November 2008 and March this year, it's evident that between April and the year end, forward bookings are on the increase and we are confident that 2009 will end on a positive note.”

GoToVictoriaFalls.com, an alliance of the key operators in Victoria Falls was launched at Indaba 2006, and has been hugely successful at keeping Victoria Falls, one of the Seven natural Wonders of the World on the international tourist map. Its strategy uses a vigorous combination of new media and traditional marketing and PR methods.

“The campaign has played a large part in correcting the image of the destination, and is now viewed as the natural point of referral on anything to do with Victoria Falls.”

The campaign had proved Victoria Falls to be a very safe and outstanding, multi-faceted destination catered to most pockets, from 5-star to luxury. The campaign has also achieved remarkable levels of awareness regarding Victoria Falls' cholera-free status in a long-running and continuing drive.

So successful was GoToVictoriaFalls.com in helping to lift Victoria Falls' overall occupancies that there was little reason to change the campaign's course whose principal *modus operandi* are “exposing our markets to the truth, constant education of the trade and honest, constant communications with the travel trade and media and between members”.

Going forward, Kennedy said solidarity amongst members, individual innovation and smart alliances to place competitive packages on the world market would ensure the growth of business operators in Victoria Falls. “Companies must make and take the decisions they must to survive these tough times.”

Already several airlines, hotels, lodges, tour and ground operators were teaming up to offer promotions whose impact on regional and international markets was already being felt.

As a collective, GoToVictoriaFalls would work to maintain the standards of Victoria Falls' assets, including the environment, flora and fauna, services and amenities, said Kennedy. “We must embrace looking to each other to pull through what's going on around us and to work for an even better destination.”

“GoToVictoriaFalls will certainly continue with renewed energy, some new members and innovative ideas to re-engineer Victoria Falls as one of Africa's key hubs.”

For further information visit www.gotovictoriafalls.com.

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