

Zimbabwe launches new destination brand

Zimbabwe has launched a fresh brand war cry, or a tourism destination brand, as they are calling it in hospitality circles: "Zimbabwe - A world of wonders". It is part of national rebranding efforts being spearheaded by Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara to help reshape the image of the country.

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#) 22 Oct 2010

But it is easy to think the tourism industry is the only sector whose performance depends on favourable international perception.

The old brand - "Zimbabwe: Africa's paradise" - has been discarded into the national archives. There was no paradise in Zimbabwe anyway over the past decade; there was an economic and political crisis that triggered record hyperinflation levels, international credit and debit cards did not transact on the domestic market and market-wide shortages made the country the butt of jokes.

Tourism depends on country branding

Of course the tourism industry is one of the economic sectors whose performance depends on country branding, and the sector is taking steps to bring in the visitor to earn the country the much-needed cash. Under the new destination brand, the country will harp on seven identified wonders to lure tourists into the country.

But the politics isn't very supportive.

Leading hotelier, Emmanuel Fundira, who is also the Zimbabwe Council of Tourism president, says it is a difficult battle for the sector, with government failing to commit enough cash for the sector's international marketing campaigns.

Politics hampering image

But the more serious problem is that while players are busy extinguishing the firestorm, politicians are still abetting the carnage.

As brand experts point out, a country's politics, its economy, the legal and social environment all contribute to national identity and image.

So while tourism players are busy creating a perception package around the country's beautiful resorts, the politicians are bickering, inevitably undoing the efforts of the tourism industry players through poor brand management.

It is what one industry executive describes, in his view, as "shock and awe".

Image tarnished by domestic politics

"But we're not in the military, we're not at war, so it's important for our politicians to understand the impact of their actions on perception," says the executive, who declined to be identified.

The politicians, argue some brand experts, present "straightforward" advertising through press coverage. And the coverage of Zimbabwe has been bad, characterised by the infighting within the inclusive government, and reports of renewed violence the country prepares for a poll next year.

That will significantly determine brand Zimbabwe, and no matter how much is splurged in international marketing, no one will want to visit, or invest, in a brand so tarnished by domestic politics its own people are determined to flee.

The visitors, and investors, will just stay away, or go to competing countries.

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

Dumisani Ndlela is a Zimbabwean journalist specialising in business and financial reporting, with experience reporting on commodities, stock and financial markets, advertising, marketing and the media. He has previously reported from a number of regional countries as well as from the UK and Germany on commodities and regional integration. He can be contacted on dndlela@yahoo.co.uk.

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