

Britain eases travel warning on Zim

The British foreign office has lowered its warning to citizens against traveling to Zimbabwe, relieving the hotel and leisure operators in the southern African country of its major marketing nightmare.

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#) 1 Sep 2008

At least 80% of hotel bookings in April alone had been cancelled after the US, the UK, Japan and South Korea issued warnings discouraging their citizens from visiting Zimbabwe due to tension and incidents of violence after the 29 March elections.

Reports suggest that at least 10 chartered flights, which were scheduled to bring tourists into the resort town of Victoria Falls, had also been cancelled due to increasing apprehension over developments in the country.

The easing of Britain travel warnings on Zimbabwe came as Zimbabwe Stock Exchange (ZSE) listed hospitality group reported depressed room occupancy levels of 36% against a budget of 47% during the half year to June 30, 2008, citing "foreign business cancellations as a result of travel warnings."

"The sales mix was 78% domestic and 22% foreign, compared with 66% and 34% respectively for the prior year," Rainbow Tourism Group board chairman, Ibbo Mandaza, told investors last week, saying revenues had again been depressed due to "the low exchange rate."

The move by Britain was therefore expected to help improve the sector's fortunes, although Mandaza said much depended on the positive outcome of faltering talks between the ruling ZANU PF party and two factions of the opposition, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Britain, which remains President Robert Mugabe's most vocal critic, last week eased its official warning against travel to Zimbabwe, citing decreased violence following the election crisis in the African country.

However, it cautioned that unrest could erupt again without warning, amid continued uncertainty over power sharing talks between Mugabe and opposition groups.

"Due to the continued decrease in violence in the country we no longer advise against all but essential travel to Zimbabwe," said the Foreign Office on its website.

"We strongly advise against all travel to high density, low-income suburban areas at any time; and all but essential travel to rural Mashonaland, rural Manicaland and farming areas. There have been a number of serious incidents in rural areas and it is dangerous for farmers or agricultural workers to visit former properties or other agricultural areas," the Foreign Office said.

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
View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>