

Cost cutting > Travellers will save money for extra use in meeting hotel and food expenses

Transport, tourism the big winners in historic railway

Travellers can enjoy game viewing as the railway snakes across Tsavo East National Park, while they can get a view of Mount Kilimanjaro, all at pocket friendly charges

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Taxi hailing app Uber has introduced a feature that allows drivers to pick customers headed in a common direction as they, in efforts to ease congestion on the roads.

The 'Driver Destinations' feature helps driver-partners automatically link to riders or trips headed in the same direction at the beginning and end of their working day.

It has been rolled out as an option to all drivers in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania with the aim of earning drivers money on their way into the city from home and on their way back.

Uber general manager for East Africa Logic Amado said constant upgrades on the app are targeted at serving the needs of driver-partners.

"Based on past feedback, we're excited that this feature can help drivers make their first and last trip of the day count even more," he said in a statement.

To access the feature, drivers need to be logged into their application, tap the clipboard icon on the top right corner of the app and either select a saved location or search for a new address.

Once they start driving towards that destination, Uber will automatically filter requests for trips along that way.

Mr Amado said introduction of the feature moves them closer to realising their corporate goals of getting more people into less cars, thereby increasing economic opportunities for the firm's driver-partners.

The 'Driver Destinations' feature is currently included in the UberX service, which is the version of Uber that is used in East Africa.

Early this year, the Uber app suffered a technical hitch that left many Nairobi drivers on the platform out of work. The company said it would compensate the affected drivers.

The service malfunction came amid reports of cases where the driver devices would stall mid-trip or fail to end a trip when the command was triggered.

The glitch also came months after Uber started rolling out a new application in Kenya that was aimed at improving customer experience.

Passengers and people keen on visiting tourist sites on the Nairobi-Mombasa route may be the major beneficiaries of the standard gauge railway service launched on Wednesday.

Apart from saving time, it also comes with pocket friendly charges. Travellers can enjoy game viewing as the railway snakes across Tsavo East National Park, while at Email they can get a view of Mount Kilimanjaro.

On Wednesday, President Uhuru Kenyatta commissioned the Sh227 billion project after flagging off the maiden passenger train in Mombasa.

The train fare between Mombasa and Nairobi was set at a promotional Sh700 for economy class and Sh3,000 for first class. On the other hand, return air fare between Mombasa and Nairobi on economy class ranges between Sh9,000 and Sh11,000, depending on the airline.

Bus fares from Mombasa to Nairobi range between Sh1,000 and Sh2,000, depending on the company and the class of seat.

According to Kenya Coast Tourism Association chief, Mr Mohammad Hersi, the passenger train could boost tourism in both cities and adjacent towns. He said the impact of the train service to

Development

FAST-TRACKING DONGO KUNDU BYPASS

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Mombasa.



Passengers inside one of the commuters trains after President Uhuru Kenyatta launched the service on Wednesday

tourism will be felt mostly during the high season, which begins in mid-July, all the way to the December festive season.

"If all goes well in the August holidays, we expect more Kenyan holidaymakers and foreign tourists to travel to Mombasa for holiday," he said.

He added: "Domestic tourists who travel by train will save money for use in meeting accommodation and food costs, or for an extended stay."

Mr Hersi, who is also the Heritage Hotels chief executive officer, said: "During the climax of the high season, a return air ticket can cost up to Sh40,000, so the affordable rail transport will be a relief to tourists."

Mr Hersi called on Kenya Railways to introduce online booking to make it easier for passengers to buy tickets.

Diani Reef Beach Resort managing director Bobby Kamani said hotels in the South Coast could get more visitors as a result of the train service if the Kenya Ferry Services is upgraded.

He said some domestic tourists would opt to travel by train from Nairobi to Mombasa and then head to Diani via the Likoni channel. "We anticipate more visitors to Diani," he said.

"But the ferry challenges should be addressed for tourists to take shorter time to reach their destinations." He added that the government should fast track the Dongo Kundu bypass project.

"Tourists would comfortably travel by road from Mombasa to Diani on the Dongo Kundu bypass," he said.

Lorry Tours director Monika Solanki said the train services would bring down travel costs and encourage both local and international visitors.

She added that it would be convenient for wildlife enthusiasts to access Tsavo East and West National parks, as well as Amboseli, from either Mombasa or Nairobi.

The train services, she said, would cut down safari package rates since rail transport is cheaper than the air alternative. Tourists would also be spared traffic jams between Mombasa and Mbarikani. "Over the years, tourists have been missing morning game drives at Tsavo East and West parks due to traffic snarl-ups," she said.

"But now tourists could head to the parks by train and then be picked by vans at Voi, Mito Andel and Email."

She said a second train should be added on the Mombasa-Nairobi route so that passengers can travel at 9am and 4pm.

Ms Solanki said the trains should make stopovers at Voi and Mito Andel. "Travellers can also enjoy game viewing in Tsavo East National Park since the water holes are near the railway line," she said.

Kenya Association of Hotelkeepers and Caterers Coast branch executive officer Sam Ikwaye said since travelling between Mombasa and Nairobi would take four to five hours, residents of the two cities would be able to take weekend vacations.

He called for investment in entertainment facilities such as discotheques and nightclubs to attract more visitors. "The entertainment industry in Mombasa is in the doldrums following the collapse of some nightclubs and discotheques," he said.