

Tanzania: Matunda Cultural Tourism Project Partners With Africa Peace Caravan

Vincent Obiro Orute Obunga

13 December 2008

Arusha — You do not need to be appointed peace envoy to promote peace across the globe, neither do you need to be a diplomat to do so. Ali Liaquat, who is the founder, the Africa Peace Caravan as well as a member, Africa Travel Association, has been quietly promoting peace across the globe but in a different style - through an annual travel across the entire African continent.

He says the idea of the Africa Peace Caravan came from the rotating hosting of the Africa Travel Association Congress (ATA) that was held in Africa last year.

The Africa Peace Caravan project is being coordinated by Ali Liaquat, who is currently based in Lilongwe, Malawi. As an experienced traveler, he is also an active member of the Africa Travel Association (ATA).

Each year, the Africa Peace Caravan travels from the country which would have just hosted the Africa Travel Association (ATA) meeting to the country where it would next be held, crossing as many ATA member countries as possible, to promote cross cultural exchanges and freedom of circulation on the African continent.

Peace promotion

Like an Olympic Torch, the Africa Peace Caravan buses travel across the African continent, carrying the Peace flag. This according to the Caravan's organizers is meant to promote peace across the entire Africa continent - a continent that has never known peace.

Aged 50, Liaquat has spent a better part of his life traveling across the globe. After 15 years in France, he decided to move and settle in Djibouti, where he opened the first and only African accredited Land and Sand - yachting Centre on Grand Bara site, which he later developed into Adventure Tourism project in the whole sub- region.

Liaquat says the vision of Africa Peace Caravan is to promote peace and freedom across the entire African continent, through an annual travel across the continent.

Unlike other annual rallies which are based on the principles of speed and competition, the Africa Peace Caravan on the other hand is as inclusive as possible, with the aim being to foster international exchange and enable the discovery and promotion of the countries involved.

Depending on the wealth and variety of partnerships secured before hand or emerging as the travel unfolds, the Africa Peace Caravan spends several days or even months traveling from country to country. It could even stop, come back or take a break to accommodate the developments on the road and on the ground, at country level or at continental level. In a sense, the Africa Peace Caravan meetings are milestones in a never- ending adventure across Sub-Saharan Africa.

According to Unambwe Z Kaaya, director, Matunda Cultural Tourism Project, who recently hosted the Africa Peace Caravan during the Caravan's whistle -stop tour of Tanzania, the purpose of the Africa Peace Caravan is to promote the countries and people's of Africa.

Building partnerships

He says based on the partnerships built ahead of the Caravan's departure, African Governments and their tourism authorities do lend support to the Africa Peace Caravan. The support extended to the Caravan by African governments include; travel authorization, access to national parks and game reserves, political support, and attendance at press conferences or other public functions upon the Caravan's arrival or departure from the capital cities.

"The African Peace Caravan works hand in hand with the tourism industry of individual member countries so as to promote countries' cultures, specific cities, and to facilitate the discovery of geographical beauties and historical heritage. It welcomes on board individuals and groups ready to contribute to the Caravan's adventure, who join the Caravan either as for part or the entire trip," said Kaaya, director, Matunda Cultural Tourism Project, which recently joined the Africa Peace Caravan as a co- partner.

Kaaya has been nominated to represent Tanzania as its peace Ambassador next year, during Africa Travel Association 34th congress, to be held at Cairo, Egypt on 17 - 22 May, 2009.

"I was nominated to be Tanzania's peace Ambassador because of the prevailing peace in our country. I feel proud to be among those that have been nominated to preach peace in our beautiful continent," said Kaaya.

Core team

But who make up the core team of the Africa Peace Caravan? This is one of the questions every discerning observer should be asking himself.

The Africa Peace Caravan travels on a Safari bus, which has been modified to fit the African roads and southern weather conditions. The bus is designed in such a way that it meets African road standards and was driven recently from Djibouti to Malawi, through Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania. It contains over 300 litres of petrol, 280 litres of water, has a small kitchen with an air compressor and a luggage compartment. It can seat a maximum of 15 people on board.

Its core traveling team comprises; the coordinator of the Caravan, one medical doctor, one mechanic, one professional journalist, one professional photographer, and one professional cook.

Apart from the coordinator, the Caravan's core team could either be permanent or changing for each country visited or in various sections of the travel.

Kaaya says in addition to the Peace Caravan's core team of 6 permanent members, 9 seats are normally reserved for tourists and partners joining along as the Caravan travels from one country to another. "These additional members of the Caravan are free to join the team in the trip for the whole trip or may opt to alight on the way as the Caravan continues with its journey from one point to another," said Kaaya.

He says if more people want to join the team as it travels from one country to another, they are free to do so as long as they pay for their travel expenses and to abide by the Caravan's travel rules and regulations.

Funding

But who finances the Caravan's trips from one country to another? This is another question every discerning observer should be asking. According to Kaaya, the Caravan relies heavily on donations and goodwill from well wishers as well as organizations that are keen on promoting peace in the entire Africa continent. These organizations donate money for fuel, for spare parts, and for accommodation for the Caravan's core team of 6 permanent members.

"We are looking for a wide range of support to the Africa Peace Caravan and are welcoming everybody who is interested in supporting our peace initiatives," said Liaquat, founder the Africa Peace Caravan as well as an active member of Africa Travel Association (ATA).

Copyright © 2008 Arusha Times. All rights reserved. Distributed by AllAfrica Global Media (allAfrica.com).