

Senegal's first Salon TICCA

West Africa cooperation urged on marine tourism

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Tatiana Rokou - *Monday, June 07, 2010*

Senegal and The Gambia should invest more in developing marine tourism, together, before the big cruise lines increase arrivals in West Africa, urged a development expert.

*"Once the big cruise companies start sailing into West Africa - which they will because of rising fuel prices and the need for fresh destinations," predicted **Lelei LeLaulu**, co-chairman of Innovation for Sustainable Development Centre, "if there are no local arrangements for their passengers, they are likely to build their own on-shore facilities, thereby decreasing cruise revenues for the host countries."*

*"West Africa should learn from the Caribbean experience where cruise lines have built their own destinations with beaches, shops and touristic activities where infrastructure was absent," stated LeLaulu, a director of the **Caribbean Media Exchange for Sustainable Tourism (CMEx)**, who admitted marine and cruise tourism can be good for Africa if managed sustainably.*

Speaking to reporters at Senegal's first "Salon TICCA," showcasing tourism, cultural industries and art from Africa, LeLaulu, an adviser to the **Africa Travel Association**, said the Gambian River *"should be developed to enhance the tourism offerings of the West African region."*

"For example, you should be able to fly from the heart of the ancient desert kingdom of Timbuktu, in Mali, onto a traditional, or modern fishing boat, and sail between Dakar and Banjul in a matter of hours," asserted LeLaulu, who also advises CDC Development Solutions, a Washington DC agency which links tourism to business development in several African countries.

The marine, river and coastal assets of West Africa offered "huge opportunities for multi-day cruises which both Senegal and The Gambia can jointly develop - there are well over 500 species of birds and an abundance of wildlife to draw visitors to the river and its many waterways," he opined.

"Gambian and Senegalese companies have the means to really turn the Gambian River into an attractive destination - it has rich human assets with several culturally distinct

peoples sharing the waterway, as well as the architectural heritage of the Portuguese, French and English colonial periods," LeLaulu asserted.

"And for those yearning for the fruits of the deep, it has some of the best fishing on the continent, with record deep water catches recorded off the West African coast," he reported, "while the Gambian river delta and waterways boast a cook's seafood delight."

LeLaulu also urged more marine transportation: *"there are high-speed boats in Senegal and Gambia which can ferry passengers between the two West African capitals in two hours for those wanting to avoid driving to and from airports for the short Dakar-Banjul flight."*

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