

Report: Zim gets chinese buy-in for Vic Falls 'Disneyland' project

In a development likely to get conservationists worried, Zimbabwe has signed an agreement with Chinese investors to develop its 'Disneyland in Africa' concept near the prime resort of Victoria Falls.



nike159 via [pixabay](#)

Tourism Minister Walter Mzembi said the conference centre and theme park was part of a vision for a \$5b tourism industry in Victoria Falls, which is a Unesco World Heritage Site. "We have signed an overarching agreement with some Chinese developers for a master plan to develop 300 hectares of land between the airport and the Masue River," Mzembi told a press conference this week.

"We need to drive the convention business and direct traffic to ourselves," Mzembi said, in quotes carried by The Source news agency. "Already we are looking at 2020 where we are dreaming of a \$5b tourism sector in Victoria Falls alone," he added.

Developments needed to ensure visitors extend their stay

The 'Disneyland in Africa' concept has been on the cards since 2013. The Source said the cost of the project has been put at \$460m.

Zimbabwe tourism officials complain that the Victoria Falls is often visited by short-stay visitors who fly in from South Africa, view the falls and then fly out without spending much money during their brief visit.

Officials insist developments are needed to make sure visitors extend their stay.

In an interview with CCTV News in 2015, Mzembi said in reference to the planned project: "You can call it what you want. You can call it an eco-Disney Land as the media is suggesting; you can call it an ultra-city... the bottom line is we want to modernise that section of the Victoria Falls."

Are earmarked for development doesn't fall within the Unesco World Heritage Site

It's understood that the area earmarked for development doesn't fall within the Unesco World Heritage Site, under which the Falls and its immediate surroundings are protected.

The Victoria Falls airport, close to the site of this proposed development, was recently expanded and upgraded to allow bigger passenger aircraft to fly in.

"Disneyland in Africa" concept unsuited to the Falls

Charlene Hewat, the chief executive of conservation group Environment Africa told News24 that a "Disneyland in Africa" concept was unsuited to the Falls. "I am really not sure that this is the right kind of project for one of the seven wonders of the world," she said.

"The Victoria Falls does need a conference centre but it needs to be done in a way that fits in with our environment and the surrounds," she added.

"I hope that Minister Mzembi calls for input from the local stakeholders before going ahead with such an enormous venture."

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