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PARIS PLANS GREEN MAKEOVER OF CHAMPS-ELYSEES FOR OLYMPICS

Paris will give the famed Champs-Elysees a makeover ahead of the 2024 Olympic Games by planting trees and increasing pedestrian areas, the French capital's officials said on Wednesday. The French often call it "the most beautiful avenue in the world" but activists complain that traffic and luxury retail have turned it into a noisy and elitist area shunned by ordinary Parisians.

"We need to re-enchant the capital's most famous avenue, which has lost a lot of its splendor in the past 30 years," the mayor of the capital's 8th district Jeanne d'Hauteserre told reporters. "It's a reduction of the space for cars, to be clear, because that's how we need to envision the city of the future," socialist Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo said.

The plan is in keeping with other efforts by the city leader to squeeze cars out of Paris and make the city more green, a push that has divided residents with critics saying her policies go too far too fast. Later Wednesday, the Paris police gave a less than enthusiastic response to Hidalgo's plans, stressing that the Champs-Elysees is a transport route, which falls under the purview of the French state.



This file artist's impression made available by PCA-STREAM shows the Concorde Square (bottom) and the Champs-Elysees avenue in Paris as Paris's famed Champs-Elysees avenue is to be given a green makeover to transform it into what the mayor says will be an "extraordinary garden". — AFP

In a tweet, the prefect of police said he would "carefully examine" the proposals from the mayor's office. His team pointed out that their boss had not received the proposals, adding that he "must be involved in the project". But supporters

have lauded the former presidential candidate Hidalgo's efforts to reduce pollution and increase green areas in the densely populated city that can become unbearable when increasingly frequent summer heatwaves hit.

Around the Arc de Triomphe, which perches atop the Champs-Elysees, the plan is to widen the pedestrian ring surrounding the monument. And at the bottom of the two kilometer-(1.2 mile) long avenue next to the Place de la Concorde,

the "Re-enchant the Champs-Elysees" plan will revamp the gardens. "We will create a hectare and a half of green spaces and plant over a hundred trees," deputy mayor Emmanuel Gregoire said.

Paris will spend 26 million euros (\$27.5 million) in the lead up to the Olympics on the works set to begin within weeks. The terraces near the top of the avenue favored by tourists will also be reworked by Belgian designer Remy Fischler, who will strive to "preserve the identity and personality" of the area, he said.

The Champs-Elysees was first laid out in 1670 but was given a revamp by Baron Haussmann, the architect behind the transformation of Paris under Napoleon III in the mid-19th century. Over the centuries, the avenue has been the stage for the high and low moments in French history, hosting celebrations and commemorations as well as protests, notably the violent Yellow Vest movement. It is also used as the route for the Bastille Day military parade, which celebrates the French republic and its armed forces on July 14, as well as the finishing point for the annual Tour de France cycle race. — AFP



LAPA signs an agreement with 'KidsArt UK'

LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA) signed an agreement with "KidsArt UK", one of the most important formative arts academies for kids in Britain, as LAPA instructors will be trained on the means of adopting a specialized approach in teaching art, and prepare a generation of young artists who are aware of Arts theories and culture, as well as the history of Art and its place in the world.

Chairwoman of LAPA Board Farieah Al-Saqqaq lauded the signing and said "our keenness to advance our services and activities made us search for the best specialized institutions in the field of formative arts, as art is a necessity not a luxury, and is more compelling now than any other time." She said "arts bring a Psychological balance the child needs, because the human being is naturally attracted to music and colors, and search

for it in his surroundings, and he makes it if he does not find it."

Developed countries adopted the providing of opportunities to develop children and adolescents' skills, as a basic tool to fight crime among the young. Member of LAPA board, Chairwoman of Formative Arts Department, Artist Ameera Behbehani spoke about the importance of this cooperation as it is "the first of its kind in Kuwait, and link us with a prestigious and a specialized academy in the field of teaching arts in a professional manner, and targets the young age, bearing in mind that this is provided only by private schools that do not cooperate with other institutions."

Founder and Chairwoman of KidsArt Academy said this the first cooperation of its kind in the Middle East, and it is an important cooperation to add to our experience as well as to develop skills and enable upcoming generations. "We both love to deal with children and we are pleased with LAPA's approach and its concentration on teaching them the techniques of various arts", adding that "art is the king of the entire sciences, as through it knowledge than be moved to the generations as Leonardo da Vinci said 500 years ago, and this is still true to date.



Disney profit slips but streaming TV subscribers jump

Disney on Wednesday said its profit slipped in the recently ended quarter but its television streaming service and parks were booming. The entertainment giant reported net income of \$470 million, just over half of the \$912 million profit it made in the same period a year earlier. But park attendance that had fallen due to the pandemic rebounded and the Disney+ television streaming service gained 7.9 million subscribers to

137.7 million. When adding in subscriptions to Disney's streaming services Hulu and ESPN, the overall number tops 205 million.

"Our strong results in the second quarter, including fantastic performance at our domestic parks and continued growth of our streaming services once again proved that we are in a league of our own," said Walt Disney Company chief executive Bob Chapek. He told analysts Disney is open to raising its streaming service subscription price in the future, but has no specific plans. Disney+ is pursuing a version of the service that would be supported by advertising, Chapek said. Disney+ gained more subscribers than analysts had expected, in stark contrast to a dive in subscriber numbers reported by rival Netflix in the first quarter of this year.

A drop of just 200,000 users-less than 0.1 percent of the total Netflix customer base-caused shares in the Silicon Valley firm to plunge and prompted a shareholder to file a lawsuit accusing the streaming television titan of not making it clear that subscriber numbers were in peril. "Disney+ has been taking Netflix out at the knees," tech analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group told AFP. "Kids have always chased their content, and for parents it has been a no-brainer to get their service." About half of Disney+ subscribers



are families with children, executives said on the earnings call. Disney stopped licensing its coveted content to Netflix to make it exclusive to its own streaming service, and said it planned to stick with the tactic when it comes to rivals in the market.

Disney said that as its streaming television service continues to grow strongly, its resorts and parks are generally operating without any of the significant COVID-19 related restrictions on capacity that were in place last year. The pandemic does continue to vex film and television show production, Disney said, but it has been able to release films in theaters so far this year. "Our slate for the remainder of this year is incredibly

strong," Chapek told analysts while discussing the company's line-up of shows for streaming and theaters.

Chapek acknowledged challenges getting Disney films released in China, saying the situation there is "very complicated" from political and business standpoints. He said he was encouraged by the fact that a freshly released "Dr. Strange" film based on a Marvel comics character took in more than \$500 million in its first week, even without being shown in China. Disney has run into political turbulence closer to home, with the Florida governor recently signing a law that eliminates a statute that has for decades allowed the entertainment giant to act as a local government in Orlando, where it has a theme park. — AFP

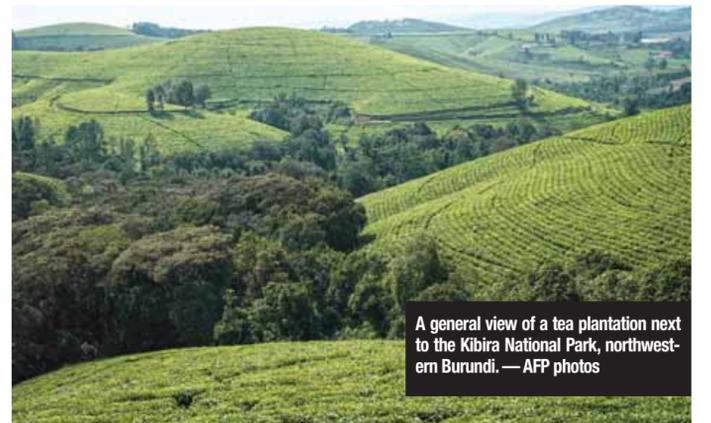
#VisitBurundi: Influencers trying to remake their nation's image

Burundi: The name does not immediately evoke centuries-old forests sheltering elusive chimpanzees, or sandy beaches lined with palm trees that stretch along one of the largest lakes in the world. Instead, the small, landlocked nation located in the heart of Africa's Great Lakes region has often been synonymous with poverty, ethnic violence and most recently, a political crisis that prompted 400,000 people to flee the country. So the young team behind the VisitBurundi initiative have a tough job on their hands.

"We have decided to show the beauty of our country, to show the culture, to finally change the image of our country, different from the one it has abroad," explains the group's general manager Bruce Niyonzima, 27. "We want Burundians and foreigners to come and visit our country," he continues, welcoming AFP to the Living Museum of Bujumbura, an intriguing cross between a craft market and a zoo, where a solitary leopard rubs shoulders with crocodiles and turkeys in Burundi's financial capital.

Launched last year, the initiative brings together around a dozen volunteers who organize trips for large groups of visitors, help to spruce up tourist destinations and, above all, broadcast Burundi's charms to the world. Their strategy is simple and can be summed up in three words: Instagram, Twitter, Facebook.

"The communication strategy we use is based on social networks because we have understood that a lot of people" use them, Darlene Nahayo, 28, told AFP. "Our target is largely young people," said the events and public relations manager, who also co-hosts a YouTube channel dedicated to women.



A general view of a tea plantation next to the Kibira National Park, northwestern Burundi. — AFP photos

prospects for tourism-domestic and international-are looking up. In 2015, the country was plunged into crisis after then president Pierre Nkurunziza declared he would run for a third term, triggering deadly violence that cost at least 1,200 lives. The 2020 election of Nkurunziza's designated successor, President Evariste Ndayishimiye, fuelled hopes of political progress, with the United States and the European Union announcing a resumption of foreign aid to the impoverished country in recent months.



A leopard holds a guinea pig in its mouth at Musee Vivant de Bujumbura (the Living Museum of Bujumbura), in Bujumbura, Burundi.

Long road ahead Rights campaigners continue to sound the alarm while a UN Commission of Inquiry warned last year that abuses had worsened since Ndayishimiye took power. But the young people behind the tourism initiative remain hopeful. "Now we have stability in terms of security and we have a president who encourages young people, who wants us to develop

our country," said Niyonzima, adding that VisitBurundi was in discussions with the authorities to formalize a partnership. Burundi's government did not respond to AFP's interview requests.

With very few visitors so far, tourist facilities are in short supply, except in Bujumbura, where hotels and beachside restaurants are scattered along the shores of Lake Tanganyika. Expanding them is one of VisitBurundi's priorities. On the outskirts of Kibira National Park, a dense forest sheltering 200 to 300 chimpanzees, a small lodge is under construction-the first to accommodate potential tourists-with a breathtaking view of the surrounding tea plantations.



A sheltered juvenile chimpanzee looks from a cage at Musee Vivant de Bujumbura (the Living Museum of Bujumbura), in Bujumbura, Burundi.

"People really like this forest... so it's better to create such a lodge to allow people to sleep" here, said tourist guide Deus-Dedit Niyiburana. Since last December, international visitors can obtain their visa on arrival at the airport-a vast improvement on a previously laborious process and a key step on the long road ahead for the young people behind VisitBurundi. — AFP