

# VoyagesAfriq

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Africa's Leading Travel and Tourism Magazine

**UN Tourism  
marks 50 years of  
global impact pg.14**

**From Roadshows to Global Impact:  
The Africa Showcase Success Story pg. 58**



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**FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup  
Seychelles 2025™: Paradise Arena  
Readies for World Event pg. 34**



# The Seychelles Islands



## Experience the Best of Endless Horizon

Namibia's Commitment to **Safety, Peace, and Tourism Growth**

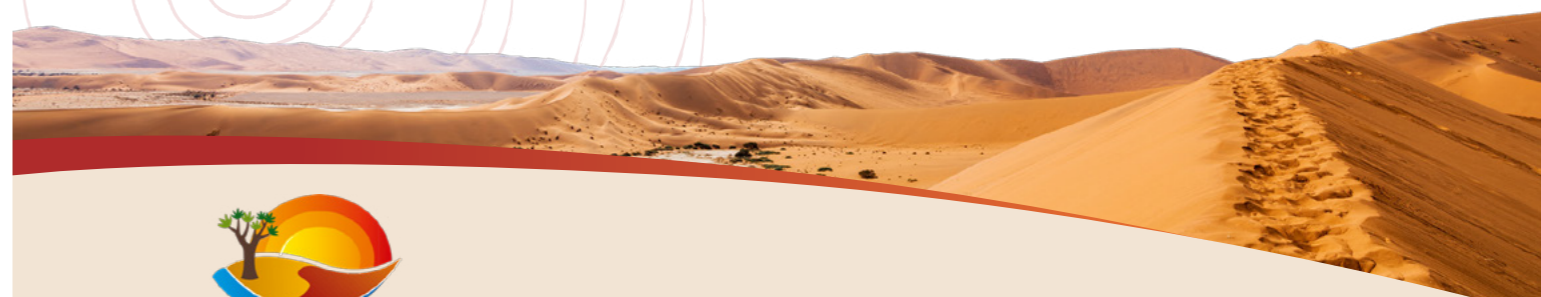
Namibia, with its breathtaking landscapes, vibrant wildlife, and rich cultural heritage, has long been a top destination for travellers. Under the slogan "The Best Get 100% Better," the Namibia Tourism Board is enhancing its country's tourism offerings, emphasizing safety, peace, and sustainable development to provide a world-class experience for every visitor.

In addition to its dedication to security, Namibia continues to enhance the quality of services available to tourists. From luxury lodges to local tours, the country's tourism industry has undergone significant improvements in training and development. Namibians are known for their warm hospitality, and visitors are increasingly treated to exceptional service at every level.

A significant milestone in Namibia's progress is the election of Hon. Ndemupelila Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah as the country's first female president. Her leadership will bring a new era of political stability, inclusivity, and good governance. By prioritizing transparency, Namibia continues to build trust among its citizens and international visitors. This peaceful political climate contributes to the country's growing reputation as one of Africa's safest and most welcoming destinations. Safety and peace are top priorities for the Namibia Tourism Board, and the government is committed to ensuring that tourists feel secure while exploring the country. Whether visiting the desert dunes or remote wildlife parks, travellers can enjoy Namibia's wonders with peace of mind.

Namibia is also at the forefront of sustainable tourism. The country's commitment to protecting its natural environment is clear, with eco-friendly initiatives and community-based conservation projects. Visitors can enjoy Namibia's pristine landscapes, from the giant Namib Desert to the wildlife-filled Etosha National Park, all while supporting efforts to preserve the country's rich biodiversity.

As Namibia continues to grow, it remains committed to offering a safe, peaceful, and sustainable destination for travellers. With a strong political foundation, a focus on security, and a dedication to improving services, Namibia's tourism offerings are truly getting 100% better. Whether you're an adventurer seeking thrills or someone looking for peace and tranquillity, Namibia guarantees an unforgettable experience.



Namibia Tourism Board

[www.visitnamibia.com.na](http://www.visitnamibia.com.na)

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## VoyagesAfric

Travel and Tourism Magazine

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## EDITORIAL

Dear Cherished Reader,

As we step into 2025, the African tourism industry is on track for unprecedented growth, transformation and innovation. The past year has marked a strong recovery for global tourism, with 1.4 billion international arrivals recorded, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. This resurgence is particularly evident across Africa, where governments, stakeholders, and businesses continue to forge new paths in investment, policy innovation, and sustainable tourism development.

In this edition of VoyagesAfric, we explore the landmark moments shaping the future of African tourism. Morocco, Africa's most-visited destination, recently hosted UN Tourism's high-level events, reinforcing its position as a hub for innovation and investment. The global tourism body also celebrated 50 years of impact, highlighting unity, progress, and transformation in an industry that remains a key driver of economic growth worldwide.

The year ahead promises exciting developments, including Sierra Leone's bold declaration of 2025 as the 'Year of Ecotourism,' signalling a strong commitment to sustainability and community-centered tourism. Similarly, Ghana's elimination of visa requirements for African passport holders is a groundbreaking move that fosters Pan-African unity and economic integration. These initiatives set a precedent for a more accessible and interconnected African tourism landscape.



Kojo Bentum-Williams

Leadership changes within the continent's tourism institutions also herald a new era. Ghana's newly appointed Minister for Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts, Hon. Dzifa Abia Gomashie, alongside key industry leaders, is set to drive the nation's tourism sector forward with fresh strategies aimed at leveraging tourism for economic transformation and cultural preservation. Likewise, Uganda has appointed Lily Ajarova as Senior Presidential Advisor on Tourism, recognizing her contributions to advancing the nation's tourism agenda on the global stage.

Beyond policy shifts and leadership transitions, Africa's luxury tourism sector is witnessing an impressive boom. Industry experts, including Penny Fraser of RX Africa, highlight the continent's growing appeal as a premier high-end travel destination. This growth is complemented by strategic investments, such as the International Finance Corporation's (IFC) €10 million loan to Azalai Hotels Group to enhance West Africa's hospitality landscape, ensuring a sustainable and competitive industry.

However, amidst these triumphs, the tourism and hospitality community mourns the loss of Dr. Carmen Nibigira, whose visionary leadership and dedication to the sector have left an enduring legacy. Her contributions to tourism development in Africa will continue to inspire future generations.

As the world turns its attention to Africa's potential, the continent is also taking centre stage in global affairs.

With Zambia set to host the Travel, Hospitality, and Tourism Education Summit and South Africa welcoming the G20 Summit to Johannesburg, the significance of African tourism in the global economy has never been more apparent. These events provide valuable platforms for African nations to showcase their diverse tourism offerings, foster collaboration, and attract further investment.

Cultural heritage remains a cornerstone of Africa's tourism appeal, with Ghana's Kente cloth and Ivory Coast's Attiéké receiving UNESCO recognition, underscoring the region's rich traditions and artistic excellence. Such acknowledgments not only preserve these cultural treasures but also reinforce their economic and tourism potential on the world stage.

As we navigate 2025, VoyagesAfric remains committed to bringing you the most insightful analyses, exclusive interviews and industry trends that define Africa's tourism landscape. This edition is filled with perspectives from seasoned industry stakeholders, in-depth previews of major travel trade shows, and thought-provoking discussions on the sector's future.


The road ahead is filled with promise and as Africa continues to make bold strides in tourism, investment and cultural preservation, we invite you to be part of this journey. The future of African tourism is now—let's embrace it together.

Have a great read!

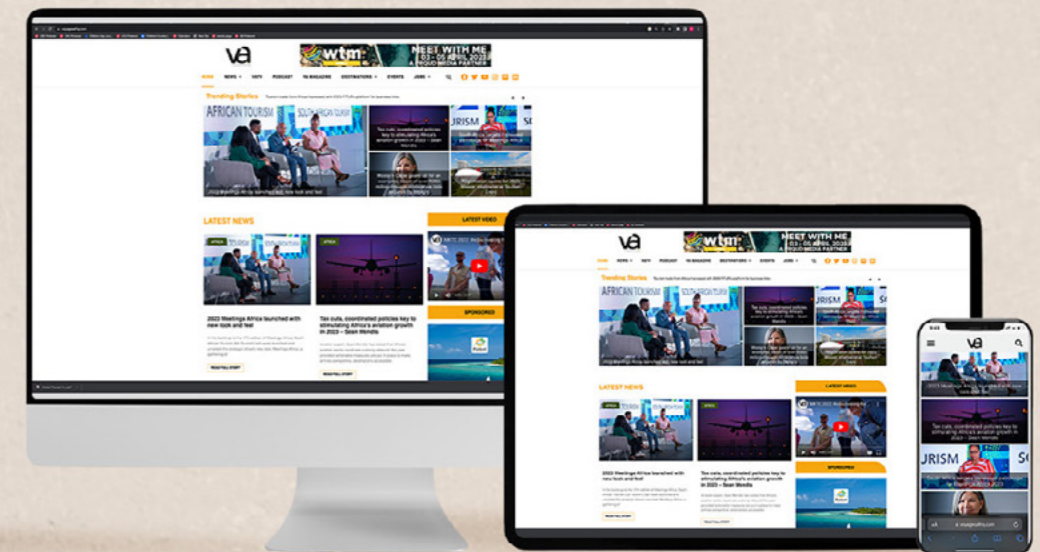


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Africa's leading Travel and Tourism Magazine



# UN Tourism in Morocco:

## Driving Investments and Celebrating Innovation in Africa's Most-Visited Destination



The *Doing Business in Morocco* publication being unveiled.

*UN Tourism has strengthened its partnership with the Kingdom of Morocco, a key ally in its mission to grow innovation across Africa and boost investments into the tourism sector of the region.*

In an official visit to the Kingdom, UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili celebrated its achievements in growing tourism and making the sector a pillar of economic diversification and sustainable growth. According to the latest UN Tourism data, Morocco welcomed 17.4 million international tourists in 2024, a 20% increase on 2023, making it the most-visited country in all of Africa. Ms. Fatim-Zahra Ammor, Minister of Tourism, Handicrafts and Social & Solidarity Economy for the Kingdom, shared the official data, and outlined the prospects for the years ahead, with Morocco set to co-host the 2030 FIFA World Cup and the 35th edition of the African Cup of Nations (AFCON-2025).

### Investment Guidelines for Morocco launched

Over the last five years, Morocco has averaged USD 3.5 billion in FDI annually across all sectors. From 2014 to 2023, USD 2.2 billion was allocated to the tourism sector. Greenfield investments

in tourism amounted to USD 2.6 billion between 2015 and 2024.

To support the further growth of tourism across the Kingdom in Rabat, UN Tourism officially launched "Tourism



UN Tourism SG Zurab Pololikashvili and Fatim Zahra Ammor, Minister of Tourism Handicrafts and Social and Solidarity Economy, Morocco

**Doing Business – Investing in Morocco**. The Guidelines – the latest in a growing portfolio of expert publications – outline the opportunities to be found in the tourism sector for international investors of all sizes. The Guidelines also set out investment trends and key areas of growth, including a focus on the Kingdom's booming innovation ecosystem.

### Supporting Moroccan tourism innovation

In Rabat, UN Tourism welcomed private sector leaders, including from SMIT Morocco, as well as leading entrepreneurs and small-business owners to celebrate innovation in the Kingdom's tourism sector. In a keynote speech on "Global Trends on Tourism Tech and Innovation", UN Tourism Executive Director Natalia Bayona highlighted the accelerating digital transformation of the sector.

Executive Director Bayona said: "Morocco's tourism sector has become a key economic driver, contributing 7.3% to GDP by 2023. With a remarkable 35% increase in international arrivals



since 2019 and USD 10.5 billion in tourism revenue, Morocco is prepared to continue its growth. The country's stable political climate and strategic economic policies fortify this success."

Fatim-Zahra Ammor, Minister of Tourism Handicrafts and Social and Solidarity Economy, adds: "The Kingdom of Morocco's political stability, its competitive edge, the openness of its economy, the view on innovation and its forward thinking investment policies collectively positions the country as a privileged destination for both national and international investors. Our engagement persists in continuing the implementation of strategic reforms aimed at unlocking the full potential of private investment, thereby facilitating the business process in Morocco".

As part of the visit, an agreement was also signed to establish the **UN Tourism Thematic Office for Africa**, furthering Morocco's role as a key partner in supporting tourism growth across the continent.

### Top Start-ups recognized

The National Tourism Startup Competition, an initiative focused on fostering innovation in the Moroccan

tourism sector and supported by the Moroccan Agency for Tourism Development (SMIT), has successfully concluded with the participation of 137 aspiring startups.

Among these, five standout enterprises were recognized for their groundbreaking contributions. Leading the charge is Ecodome, securing first place for its innovative approach to sustainable tourism. In a tie for second place, ATAR and Pikala showcased

exceptional potential with their unique offerings. Taking the third spot is Wanaut, noted for its creative solutions in enhancing travel experiences. Finally, Mouja claimed fourth place, impressing judges with its forward-thinking strategies. This competition highlights Morocco's commitment to nurturing entrepreneurial talent and advancing its tourism industry through strategic investments and support.





Fatim Zahra Ammor, Minister of Tourism Handicrafts and Social and Solidarity Economy, Morocco



UN Tourism Secretary General, Zurab Pololikashvili



Karim Zidane, Minister Delegate to the Head of Government, responsible for Investment, Convergence, and the Evaluation of Public Policies



Imad Barrakad, CEO, SMIT



UN Tourism Executive Director, Natalia Bayona



Hamid Bentaher, Chairman of the National Confederation of Tourism (CNT)



Elcia Grandcourt, UN Tourism Regional Director for Africa



UN Tourism SG Zurab Pololikashvili and Nasser Bourita, Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates

## UN Tourism Chief Holds Talks with Morocco's Foreign Affairs Minister in Rabat

The Secretary-General of UN Tourism, Zurab Pololikashvili, met with Nasser Bourita, Morocco's Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation, and Moroccan Expatriates, in Rabat on Monday, January 27.

The meeting marked the start of the Secretary-General's two-day working visit to Morocco, during which he also participated in the Conference on Technological Innovation and Tourism Investment.

During the meeting, Minister Bourita emphasized the strategic partnership between Morocco and UN Tourism, grounded in shared priorities and a common vision for the future of global tourism. He highlighted the Kingdom's leadership in promoting sustainable tourism on a global scale, aligned with the vision of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, which positions the tourism sector as a lever for sustainable development and economic growth.

On the opening of a UN Tourism Thematic Office in Morocco, Mr. Bourita welcomed the decision, explaining that the office will act as a platform for collaboration between Morocco, UN

Tourism, and member countries. This initiative aligns with Morocco's approach to fostering active and pragmatic South-South cooperation, as envisioned by His Majesty King Mohammed VI.

The Minister also highlighted Morocco's significant projects in tourism, including the organization of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations and the 2030 FIFA World Cup. He noted that these events provide opportunities to showcase Morocco's tourism potential while adhering to international standards for sustainable tourism.

Mr. Bourita further underlined the importance of sports tourism as a pillar of Morocco's development strategy, contributing to peace, stability, and cultural exchange.

In response, Secretary-General Pololikashvili commended the vision of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, particularly in job creation and the advancement of sustainable tourism. He also praised Morocco's readiness to host global and regional sporting events, such as the Africa Cup of Nations and the FIFA World Cup, emphasizing how these initiatives reinforce the Kingdom's



position as a hub for international sporting events.

The Secretary-General reaffirmed UN Tourism's commitment to supporting Morocco through the provision of expertise and technical assistance to ensure the success of these major projects.

Morocco has been a UN Tourism member since 1975 and is actively engaged in the organization's activities. The country currently holds a seat on the UN Tourism Executive Council.

This visit further cements the collaboration between Morocco and UN Tourism, underscoring the Kingdom's commitment to advancing sustainable tourism development.

## Morocco to Host UN Tourism's First Thematic Office in Africa

The Kingdom of Morocco has taken a significant step in strengthening its leadership in Africa's tourism sector with the signing of an agreement to host the first United Nations Thematic Office for tourism on the continent. The agreement, finalized in Marrakech between Morocco's Minister of Tourism, Handicrafts, and Social and Solidarity Economy, Fatim-Zahra Ammor, and UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, marks a milestone in the partnership between Morocco and the UN's leading tourism body.

The new thematic office, to be based in Rabat, will focus on fostering innovation, investment, and capacity-building initiatives tailored to Africa's tourism industry. It will serve as a hub for workshops, conferences, and forums, as well as a platform for startup competitions designed to encourage entrepreneurial ventures across the continent.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Minister Ammor emphasized that the decision to establish the office in Morocco reaffirms the country's leadership in tourism development on the continent. She noted that the initiative aligns with King Mohammed VI's vision for African collaboration and the UN Tourism 2030 agenda for the region.

UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili highlighted the significance of this new office, stating, "This office will ensure decentralized, effective communication and coordination with partners while bolstering the actions of



Morocco's Minister of Tourism Fatim Zahra Ammor and UN Tourism SG Zurab Pololikashvili signing the official hosting agreement

***“In respect to Marrakech, Morocco is one of the founders of UN Tourism, and we are very happy that our relationship and partnership is now advancing to this next stage. This means that we will have a presence in Africa for the first time ever in the history of UN Tourism, launching new projects, new communications with our member states.”***

UN Tourism for the benefit of Africa's tourism sector.” He also underlined Morocco's growing role in attracting global investment to the tourism industry, referencing the launch of new investment guidelines aimed at guiding international stakeholders.

“And, of course, I don't want to forget the investment guidelines we just launched three hours ago. We want to bring more investors and guide them on why they should invest in Morocco. Morocco is one of the most visited countries,” Pololikashvili remarked.

The establishment of the thematic office marks the first time UN Tourism will have a permanent presence on the African continent, a milestone that Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili described as the beginning of a new era.

“In respect to Marrakech, Morocco is one of the founders of UN Tourism, and we are very happy that our relationship and partnership is now advancing to this next stage. This means that we will have a presence in Africa for the first time ever in the history of UN Tourism, launching new projects, new communications with our member states. This is a historical day and a historical moment. I want to congratulate Morocco, the entire African continent, and UN Tourism. From today, our relationship is moving to another level of partnership with all our African member states,” he stated.

The thematic office is expected to provide African countries with access to resources that will drive sustainable tourism development, improve investment opportunities, and enhance regional cooperation. With Morocco's well-established infrastructure and commitment to tourism, the office is positioned to be a catalyst for growth across the continent.



## Middle East Members back UN Tourism's Vision for the Region

UN Tourism's Member States from across the Middle East have met again to guide the continued growth of the sector across the region. The 51st session of the Regional Commission welcomed high-level delegations from 13 Member States, including eight Ministers of Tourism to assess achievements, analyse sector trends and focus on key priorities.

The Middle East finished 2024 as the region with fastest recovery from the impacts of the pandemic in the world. UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili paid special recognition of the Commission's hosts, Qatar, which is on track to hit its target of welcoming 6 million tourists a year and growing tourism's contribution to GDP to 12%. “The Middle East stands out as one of the most exciting places for tourism right now. The region is a leader in fields such as luxury tourism, wellness tourism and sports tourism, and is also at the forefront of vital work to grow investments into the sector and provide education and training for millions of future tourism workers,” Secretary-General Pololikashvili said.

### Middle East: Tourism education leader

The reports of the Secretary-General and the Regional Director for the Middle East, focused on UN Tourism's work to support Members develop talent through education and professional development. Key achievement include:

30,000 students – more than half of them women – have now signed up to the UN Tourism Online Academy, which offers 50 courses from 18 academic partners, including new courses just finalised



with the support of Saudi Arabia. The UN Tourism Education Toolkit for tourism in High Schools is being implemented in the United Arab Emirates. 10 new courses have been added to the Human Capital Development by E-Learning Project with Saudi Arabia. The platform has also been upgraded to integrate Artificial Intelligence.

Together with its Member States, UN Tourism is advancing education-related activities across the region. Notably, in Saudi Arabia, the Riyadh School of Tourism and Hospitality is training tourism professionals and giving them relevant skills to lead the sector forward.

### Sports Tourism key pillar of diversification

In Doha, the growing relevance of sports tourism as a tool for economic diversification was made clear, with the success of the Qatar FIFA World Cup of 2022 presented as a model for other destinations to follow.

The FIFA World Cup, Formula 1 races in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, the Dakar rally in Saudi Arabia, and the

acquisition of major football players and teams from around the world – were all recognized as helping make the Middle East one of the most exciting and influential regions in world sports and sports tourism right now. The relevance of this part of the sector was further reflected in the hosting of a special one-day conference on Sports Tourism and the Tourism Industry After the World Cup within the framework of the Regional Commission.

Reflecting UN Tourism's commitment to strengthening resilience and creating opportunities through diversification, the significant potential of wellness tourism for the region was also emphasized. Equally, the growing importance of gastronomy tourism as a pillar of rural development and cultural heritage was underscored.

### Regional cooperation on display

In accordance with the statutory obligations of the Commission, Member States confirmed key appointments for the years ahead. In a spirit of regional fraternity, Members agreed that Kuwait will serve as Chair of the Regional Commission for 2025-27, with Qatar as first Vice-Chair and Iraq as second Vice-Chair. Egypt and the UAE will sit on the UN Tourism Executive Council (2025-29).

Meanwhile, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will sit on the Committee on Tourism Online Education (2025-29) and the UAE will sit on the Technical Committee for the International Code for the Protection of Tourists for the same period.

To conclude, Members agreed that the 52nd Regional Commission for the Middle East will be held in the city of Kuwait, Kuwait, in 2026.



UN Tourism Zurab Pololikashvili speaking the anniversary launch



# UN Tourism marks 50 years of global impact: A milestone of unity, progress & transformation

The global tourism sector has reached a significant milestone as UN Tourism officially launched its 50th-anniversary celebrations in Madrid. The prestigious event, attended by ministers, dignitaries and industry leaders, underscored the organisation's half-century-long journey of fostering international connections, cultural exchange and economic growth.

Speaking at the event, UN Tourism Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili reflected on the organisation's remarkable evolution from its inception to becoming a leading force in global tourism.

"Fifty years – half a century redefining what tourism is and, more importantly, what it can achieve," he stated. "Tourism is not just a sector of the economy; it is a force for connection, understanding and transformation."

From its origins as the International Union of Official Tourism Organizations to the establishment of the World Tourism Organization and its eventual transformation into UN Tourism, the organisation has been at the forefront of guiding the industry through various global challenges, including security



Minister of Tourism and UN Tourism Executive Council Chair Celso Sabino

threats, economic downturns and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the key themes of the celebration is the enduring role of tourism in promoting peace and global unity. Pololikashvili reminded attendees that the organisation was founded in the wake of conflict and remains deeply committed to fostering mutual respect and dialogue.

"Tourism is uniquely positioned to build bridges in an often divided world," he



UN Tourism Regional Director for Europe Cordula Wohlmuther

said. "It enables communities to engage in peace, shows that dialogue triumphs over discord, and proves that shared experiences transcend borders."

In an era of rising global tensions, with 56 active conflicts—the highest number since World War II—UN Tourism's mission remains as relevant as ever. The Secretary-General reaffirmed that when tourism thrives, stability follows, creating a ripple effect that benefits economies, preserves heritage, and empowers local communities.



Over the past 50 years, UN Tourism has continually evolved to meet the changing demands of the industry. Notable initiatives include the establishment of Regional Thematic Offices in Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan, which bridge global strategies with local implementation. Additionally, the organisation's focus on education, innovation and investment has reinforced tourism as not just an economic powerhouse but also as a driver of sustainability and social progress.

Pololikashvili also paid tribute to the visionaries who laid the foundations of modern tourism, acknowledging their foresight and determination in transforming the sector into a global force for good. He urged the current generation of tourism leaders to continue this legacy with the same level of courage and clarity.

"As we face a future marked by rapid technological advancements and unpredictable challenges, it is up to us to lead with the same vision and resilience," he stated.

The milestone celebration also recognised the role of partnerships in shaping the tourism industry. A special tribute was paid to FITUR, one of the world's premier tourism fairs, which celebrated its 45th edition this year. Brazil, a key partner for FITUR, was acknowledged for its collaboration, with Minister Celso Sabino receiving commendation for his recent election as President of UN Tourism's Executive Board.



The event also brought a significant announcement: UN Tourism will soon be moving to a new headquarters next to the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium in Madrid. The move, made possible through the support of the Spanish government, underscores the city's enduring commitment to global tourism.

For UN Tourism, the next chapter for the organisation is to continue its commitment to making tourism a beacon of hope, resilience and progress. Pololikashvili emphasised this by stating that "Tourism is much more than a sector of the economy; it is a global movement. It serves as a bridge in times of division and acts as a driving force for peace and understanding."





# International tourism recovers pre-pandemic levels in 2024

With 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals recorded globally, 2024 marked the recovery of international tourism from the worst crisis in the sector's history. A majority of destinations welcomed more international tourists in 2024 than they did before the pandemic, while visitor spending also continued to grow strongly.

According to the latest World Tourism Barometer from UN Tourism, an estimated 1.4 billion tourists travelled internationally in 2024, indicating a virtual recovery (99%) of pre-pandemic levels. This represents an increase of 11% over 2023, or 140 million more international tourist arrivals, with results driven by strong post-pandemic demand, robust performance from large source markets and the ongoing recovery of destinations in Asia and the Pacific.

The Middle East, Europe and Africa see strongest results in 2024 relative to 2019.

The Middle East (95 million arrivals) remained the strongest-performing region when compared to 2019, with international arrivals 32% above pre-pandemic levels in 2024, though 1% higher compared to 2023.

Africa (74 million) welcomed 7% more arrivals than in 2019, and 12% more than in 2023. Europe, the world's largest destination region, saw 747 million international arrivals in 2024 (+1% above 2019 levels and 5% over 2023) supported by strong intraregional demand. All European subregions surpassed pre-pandemic levels, except for Central and Eastern Europe where many destinations are still suffering from the lingering effects of the Russian aggression on Ukraine.

The Americas (213 million) recovered 97% of pre-pandemic arrivals (-3% over 2019), with the Caribbean and Central America already exceeding 2019 levels. Compared to 2023, the region saw 7% growth.

Asia and the Pacific (316 million) continued to experience a rapid recovery in 2024, though arrival numbers were still 87% of pre-pandemic levels, an improvement from 66% at the end of 2023. International arrivals grew 33% in 2024, an increase of 78 million from 2023.

By subregions, North Africa and Central America saw the strongest performance in 2024, with 22% and 17% more international arrivals than before the pandemic. Southern Mediterranean Europe (+8%) and the Caribbean (+7%) also enjoyed robust growth, as did Northern Europe (+5%) and Western Europe (+2%).

UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: "In 2024, global tourism completed its recovery from the pandemic and, in many places, tourist arrivals and specially earnings are already higher than in 2019. Growth is expected to continue throughout 2025, driven by strong demand contributing to the socio-economic development of

both mature and emerging destinations. This recalls our immense responsibility as a sector to accelerate transformation, placing people and planet at the center of the development of tourism."

Majority of destinations reported arrival figures well above pre-pandemic levels in 2024

Most destinations reporting monthly data continued to enjoy strong results in 2024, with a majority exceeding pre-pandemic levels. Available data for the first 10 to 12 months of 2024 shows several destinations reporting double-digit growth compared to 2019:

El Salvador (+81%), Saudi Arabia (+69%), Ethiopia (+40%), Morocco (+35%), Guatemala (+33%) and the Dominican Republic (+32%), all exceeded pre-pandemic levels by far in the full twelve months of 2024.

Qatar (+137%), Albania (+80%), Colombia (+37%), Andorra (+35%), Malta and Serbia (both +29%) enjoyed strong growth through October or November 2024, compared to the same ten or eleven months of 2019.

The full recovery of international tourism in 2024 is also reflected in the performance of other industry indicators. According to the UN Tourism Tracker, both international air capacity and air traffic virtually recovered pre-pandemic levels through October 2024 (IATA). Global occupancy rates for accommodation reached 66% in November, slightly below 69% in November 2023 (based on STR data).

## Exports from tourism reached a record USD 1.9 trillion in 2024

International tourism receipts saw robust growth in 2024 after virtually already reaching pre-pandemic levels in 2023, in real terms (adjusting for inflation and exchange rate fluctuations).

Receipts reached USD 1.6 trillion in 2024, about 3% more than in 2023 and 4% more than in 2019 (real terms), according to preliminary estimates.

As growth stabilizes, average spending is gradually returning to pre-pandemic values, from nearly USD 1,400 per international arrival in 2020 and 2021, to an estimated USD 1,100 in 2024. This

**“ In 2024, global tourism completed its recovery from the pandemic and, in many places, tourist arrivals and specially earnings are already higher than in 2019. Growth is expected to continue throughout 2025, driven by strong demand contributing to the socio-economic development of both mature and emerging destinations. This recalls our immense responsibility as a sector to accelerate transformation, placing people and planet at the center of the development of tourism. ”**

is still above the average of USD 1,000 of before the pandemic.

Total exports from tourism (including passenger transport) reached a record USD 1.9 trillion in 2024, about 3% higher than before the pandemic (real terms), according to preliminary estimates.

Several destinations reported outstanding growth in international tourism receipts during the first nine to eleven months of 2024. These include Kuwait (+232%), El Salvador (+206%), Saudi Arabia (+148%), Albania (+136%), Serbia (+98%), Republic of Moldova (+86%), and Canada (+70%), all in local currencies. These countries also enjoyed double-digit growth in receipts in 2024 compared to 2023.

Among the world's top five tourism earners, the United Kingdom (+40%), Spain (+36%), France (+27%) and Italy (+23%) saw robust growth in the first nine to eleven months of 2024, compared to 2019.

Data on international tourism expenditure reflects the same trend, especially among large source markets such as Germany, the United Kingdom

(both +36% compared to 2019), the United States (+34%), Italy (+25%) and France (+11%). Expenditure from India remained high in the first half of 2024 (+81% above 2019 levels), after extraordinary growth in 2023.

## Positive outlook for 2025 points to continued growth

International tourist arrivals are expected to grow 3% to 5% in 2025 compared to 2024, assuming a continued recovery of Asia and the Pacific and solid growth in most other regions. This initial projection assumes global economic conditions remain favorable, inflation continues to recede, and geopolitical conflicts do not escalate.

The outlook reflects a stabilization of growth rates after a strong rebound in international arrivals in 2023 (+33% vs 2022) and 2024 (+11% vs 2023).

The latest UN Tourism Confidence Index confirms these positive expectations. Around 64% of UN Tourism Panel of Experts see 'better' or 'much better' prospects for 2025 compared to 2024. Some 26% expect similar performance in their destination, while only 9% believe 2025 be 'worse' or 'much worse' than last year.

However, economic and geopolitical headwinds continue to pose significant risks. More than half of respondents point to high transport and accommodation costs and other economic factors such as volatile oil prices, as the main challenges international tourism will face in 2025. Against this backdrop, tourists are expected to continue to seek value for money.

Geopolitical risks (aside from ongoing conflicts) are a growing concern among the Panel of Experts, which ranked them as the third main factor after the economic ones. Extreme weather events and staff shortages are also critical challenges, ranking fourth and fifth among the factors identified by the Panel of Experts.

Balancing growth and sustainability will be critical in 2025, as reflected by two major trends identified by the Panel of Experts: the search for sustainable practices and the discovery of lesser-known destinations.



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## Sierra Leone Declares 2025 as the 'Year of Ecotourism': A Strategic Vision for Sustainable Tourism



Sierra Leone's tourism industry is entering a transformative phase with the official designation of 2025 as the 'Year of Ecotourism.' Announced by the Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Nabeela Farida Tunis, during her end-of-year address, this strategic shift signals a renewed commitment to sustainability, responsible tourism, and community-centered development.

As global tourism trends increasingly favor sustainability, Sierra Leone is positioning itself as a leader in ecotourism. The initiative builds upon the achievements of the 2024 'Tourism for All' campaign, which emphasized inclusivity, cultural heritage preservation, and community engagement. Minister Tunis underscored the importance of ensuring tourism growth aligns with environmental conservation, stating, "Sustainable tourism is everyone's business, as it involves making choices that protect the environment, support communities, and preserve cultural heritage. Being eco-conscious in tourism will contribute to a more sustainable future for Sierra Leone. As 2025 is our Year of Ecotourism, let us make a difference by taking steps together to restore the integrity of our Tourism Development Areas and Zones."

By focusing on ecotourism, Sierra Leone aims to showcase its diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and commitment to conservation while simultaneously driving economic development. The initiative seeks to create a balance between tourism expansion and environmental sustainability, ensuring long-term benefits for both local communities and the nation at large.

The 2025 initiative is structured around several key focus areas:

- **Sustainable Destination Development** - Investments will be directed towards eco-friendly infrastructure, including sustainable lodges, nature trails, and

protected areas designed to enhance visitor experiences while preserving biodiversity.

- **Community-Driven Ecotourism** - Recognizing the vital role of local communities in tourism, the government will support projects that empower communities through economic participation, fostering a sense of ownership and long-term sustainability.

- **Heritage and Wildlife Conservation** - Conservation efforts will be intensified, with a focus on protecting endangered species, restoring ecosystems, and maintaining the integrity of historical sites.

- **Industry Collaboration and Investment** - Partnerships with investors and tourism professionals will be strengthened to facilitate the implementation of sustainable tourism models that benefit both conservation efforts and economic growth.

- **Educational and Awareness Campaigns** - Public engagement initiatives will play a crucial role in fostering responsible tourism. Programs will be introduced to educate locals and visitors on the importance of ecotourism and environmental stewardship.

Sierra Leone's push for ecotourism is not an isolated effort but part of a broader movement towards sustainable tourism across Africa. The continent's abundant natural and cultural resources present a unique opportunity to redefine tourism through sustainability-focused strategies. By championing ecotourism, Sierra Leone sets a precedent for responsible tourism development that balances economic opportunity with environmental and cultural preservation.

Minister Tunis further emphasized the government's strategic vision, stating, "We declared 2025 as the Year of Ecotourism guided by two key priorities: consolidating the progress made in revitalizing the sector last year and embedding sustainability at its core, leaving no one behind. Throughout this year, our policies and initiatives will focus on conserving our environment, protecting natural resources and wildlife, and strengthening

“ *Sustainable tourism is everyone's business, as it involves making choices that protect the environment, support communities, and preserve cultural heritage. Being eco-conscious in tourism will contribute to a more sustainable future for Sierra Leone. As 2025 is our Year of Ecotourism, let us make a difference by taking steps together to restore the integrity of our Tourism Development Areas and Zones.* ”

the economic, social, and cultural well-being of communities.”

This transition represents a strategic leap in the country's tourism evolution, reinforcing its position as an emerging destination that prioritizes ecological integrity, cultural preservation, and inclusive economic growth. The shift from the 'Tourism for All' campaign to the 'Year of Ecotourism' reflects an intentional progression towards a more sustainable, resilient, and globally competitive tourism sector.

Building on significant achievements from the previous year, such as the restoration of historical monuments, increased recognition of women's contributions to tourism, and collaborative community initiatives, the 'Year of Ecotourism' is expected to further elevate Sierra Leone's tourism sector. Conservation partnerships, heritage site restorations, and innovative tourism models will play a crucial role in ensuring that Sierra Leone not only attracts visitors but also protects its natural and cultural assets for generations to come.

As 2025 unfolds, Sierra Leone stands at the threshold of a new era in tourism, demonstrating that responsible tourism can be a powerful driver of national development. The 'Year of Ecotourism' is more than just a thematic campaign; it represents a transformative commitment to integrating sustainability into the very fabric of the country's tourism strategy, positioning Sierra Leone as a model for sustainable travel in Africa and beyond.

## Zimbabwe Charts Bold Path with Sustainability, Inclusivity, and Global Partnerships in Tourism Sector

Zimbabwe is positioning itself as a major player in global tourism, leveraging sustainability initiatives, inclusivity, and strategic partnerships. At the recently concluded FITUR in Madrid, Zimbabwe took centre stage, strengthening its presence in the Spanish, European markets and beyond.

“This year, the main focus is on marketing the destination through FITUR,” said Zimbabwe’s Minister of Tourism and Hospitality Industry, Barbara Rwodzi.

The country showcased its diverse attractions, from the breathtaking Victoria Falls to the rolling landscapes of the Eastern Highlands, the cultural heritage of Great Zimbabwe, and the serene waters of Kariba. Minister Rwodzi underscored Zimbabwe’s commitment to increasing visibility and attracting more Spanish and European tourists.

“We want more and more Spanish people to know about our destination, visit Zimbabwe, and experience its beauty. We want them to come,” she stated.

### Sustainability at the Core

However, at the heart of Zimbabwe’s tourism strategy is a firm commitment to sustainability. The country participated in the Commit for Sustainable Tourism initiative and has put in a bid to host the next meeting, a move that Rwodzi believes will have a lasting impact on Zimbabwe’s tourism sector.

“We are championing sustainable tourism in Africa and want to be one of the leading countries advancing this agenda. Going green in all facilities is key,” she said.

To achieve this, Zimbabwe is making legislative changes, ensuring that sustainability becomes an industry-wide mandate.

“We are amending our tourism bill to put these policies into law. All operators in the sector must conserve electricity and embrace green infrastructure. We are also enforcing a zero-tolerance policy on plastic use in all facilities,” she explained.

Beyond infrastructure, Zimbabwe’s sustainability drive extends to community inclusivity, ensuring that all stakeholders benefit from the tourism value chain.

“We need inclusivity in the industry: whether in gastronomy or hospitality. Women, youth, and people with disabilities must be actively involved, and all facilities must be accessible to everyone,” she added.

### Strategic Partnerships: Culinary Tourism Takes the Spotlight

On the other hand, Zimbabwe’s growing collaboration with UN Tourism is paving the way for transformative projects. One of the key developments discussed at FITUR was the establishment of Africa’s first-ever School of Culinary Arts in Victoria Falls, in partnership with UN Tourism.

“The meeting went very well. We discussed the modalities: what UN Tourism should do, what the government of Zimbabwe should do, and where we should be by this time next year in terms of progress,” Rwodzi said.

The initiative builds on Zimbabwe’s successful hosting of the Africa Gastronomy Forum in 2024, which, according to the minister, has already yielded tangible results.

“The forum has had a visible impact, increasing tourist confidence in Zimbabwe. By working with UN Tourism on initiatives like these, we are reinforcing our destination’s credibility and boosting international arrivals,” she noted.



Zimbabwe’s Minister of Tourism and UN Tourism Secretary General, Zurab Pololikashvili

### Looking Ahead: Strengthening Global Ties

Also, Zimbabwe remains committed to deepening its partnerships with UN Tourism and other global stakeholders, recognising their role in shaping a positive perception of the country.

“We look forward to working even more closely with UN Tourism, implementing more programmes together. These efforts enhance our reputation and have a direct impact on increasing tourist numbers, both internationally and domestically,” Rwodzi concluded.

With a clear vision and actionable strategies, the minister assured that Zimbabwe is well on its way to becoming a leading sustainable tourism destination, offering rich cultural experiences, inclusive development, and world-class attractions.



FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem and UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili at the FIA Gala night in Kigali

## UN Tourism and FIA Gear Up to Drive Sustainable Sports Tourism Growth in Africa

Sports tourism is quickly establishing itself as one of the fastest-growing sectors in the global tourism industry, with an estimated annual growth rate of 17.5%. Valued at a staggering \$610 billion, this sector presents an exciting opportunity for economic diversification and sustainable development, particularly in Africa. Recognizing the immense potential, UN Tourism has strengthened its collaboration with the Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile (FIA) to promote the role of sports tourism in driving growth while emphasizing sustainability.

In August 2024, UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili shared the organization’s vision for responsible tourism, highlighting the significant role sports tourism can play in fostering economic resilience, social equity, and environmental responsibility. As part of this collaboration, FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem was appointed a UN Tourism Ambassador, reinforcing the commitment to leveraging sports tourism to benefit local communities and support sustainable practices.

Speaking at a session of the assembly titled “Sustainable Tourism Through A Just Transition Lens” Pololikashvili acknowledged the critical role of events

like Formula 1 and the Olympics in driving tourism. He highlighted Rwanda’s success in integrating sports tourism in its broader development strategy, focusing on initiatives such as the Kwita Izina festival, which not only attracts visitors but also helps preserve the nation’s natural heritage. “Rwanda’s efforts to use sports tourism to enhance its global positioning are commendable,” said Pololikashvili.

In Kigali, Pololikashvili also met with key Rwandan leaders, including Rwanda Development Board CEO Francis Gatare and Minister of Foreign Affairs Olivier J.P. Nduhungirehe. These discussions centered on investment, education, and the role of sports in tourism diversification. Rwanda’s growing commitment to sustainable tourism through sports was also a central theme in these meetings, with plans for further collaboration between UN Tourism, the FIA, and Rwanda’s leadership.

Pololikashvili took the opportunity to thank President Paul Kagame for his unwavering support for tourism in the region, noting that sports tourism is a powerful tool to unite people and promote Africa’s rich cultural heritage. He stated, “As we celebrate the landmark 150th FIA General Assembly in Kigali, Rwanda, we recognize your steadfast

support for tourism and our shared belief in the power of sports tourism to bring people together.”

At the heart of this growing sector, the third World Sports Tourism Congress, held in Madrid, demonstrated the increasing global interest in sports tourism. The congress underscored the sector’s capacity to generate substantial tourism revenue while fostering cross-cultural exchanges. As Pololikashvili reflected, sports tourism is not only reshaping the travel landscape, but also driving innovative strategies for long-term sustainability.

The UN Tourism-FIA partnership aims to channel investments into sports infrastructure and integrate sustainable practices into the development of global sporting events. As this collaboration continues to grow, it is clear that sports tourism is more than just a game – it is a powerful tool for economic growth, sustainable development, and global cooperation.

As sports tourism continues to expand, the message is clear: Africa is ready to capitalize on its diverse tourism offerings, leveraging the global appeal of sports to attract visitors, boost local economies, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

# International Women’s Day 2025: Empowering Women and Girls Through Tourism

On March 2025, the world will come together to celebrate **International Women’s Day** under the theme *“For ALL women and girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment.”* This is more than a motto; it’s a rallying cry to make the world a place where every woman and girl gets a fair opportunity to blossom. This year, we are shining a light on how the tourism sector can become a driver for that change.

Tourism is more than travel; it is a strong platform for the economic empowerment and cultural exchange and leadership that empowers women and girls across the world. On the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we are celebrating and making a resolution to further strengthen tourism in support of the achievement of gender equality.

## A Journey Towards Equality

Back in 1995, the Beijing Declaration had spelled out a grand vision regarding the rights of women on every aspect of life, from education and health to economic empowerment and peacebuilding. Now, 30 years later, much has indeed been achieved, but much is still left behind.

Tourism can be at the forefront of that journey.

Tourism provides jobs and leadership opportunities for millions of women. From the small-scale entrepreneurs operating eco-lodges to women guiding tourists through their communities, the opportunities in the industry are endless to break through the glass ceiling. These women do not just form part of the tourist landscape but form part of shaping it.

## Empowering Women Through Travel

Tourism also addresses some systemic concerns: it can provide money for education via community projects, display various cultures that foster gender equality in their own way, and provide women with economic independence because of decent employment.

But it’s not just economics: tourism can change perceptions and build understanding. As travelers come into contact with new cultures, stereotypes are confronted and attitudes broaden. This is a very powerful cultural exchange

that may spur changes in greater respect and equality.

## Youth Leadership and Innovation

The future of tourism rests with the next generation, particularly the young women and girls. It is in education and leadership opportunities that we should be investing for them to lead from the front in innovations in the industry. Think of a world where young women lead sustainable tourism projects, using digital technologies to foster responsible travel and climate justice.

## A Call to Action

Let this International Women’s Day remind us of those pioneering women and of those who are still fighting. Be you a traveler, a business leader, or a community advocate, everyone has something to do. Support women-led tourism initiatives, fight for fair policies, and use your voice to champion equality.

Together, we can make tourism a force for good: a means of empowerment, a bridge between cultures, and a path to a future where no woman or girl is left behind.



# Dr. Carmen Nibigira: A Legacy of Vision, Leadership, and Impact



The tourism and hospitality community across Africa and beyond is mourning the loss of Dr. Carmen Nibigira, who passed away on November 16, 2024, in Nairobi at the age of 46, leaving behind a legacy that will resonate for generations.

A force of nature in the industry, Carmen was more than a leader: she was a mentor, a changemaker, and an unwavering advocate for a borderless East Africa.

But beyond her titles, Carmen was known for her heart. She mentored young professionals, championed women’s education, and believed in tourism’s power to transform communities. She served on the board of the Akilah Institute, ensuring that young women had the opportunity to pursue leadership roles in hospitality and conservation. Even in moments of political instability, she found ways to keep the mission alive, helping relocate Akilah’s Burundian students to Rwanda to continue their studies.

Her warmth and wisdom left a lasting impression on those who worked with her. Jean Byamugisha, Executive Director of the Uganda Hotel Owners Association, recalled, “We had so many plans for capacity building in the hotel sector. Carmen’s passion for training young people in hospitality was unparalleled. May we continue your legacy!”

That legacy is already being honoured. In tribute to Carmen’s lifelong dedication to education, the Dr. Carmen Nibigira Scholarship Fund has been launched to support female students pursuing studies in hospitality, tourism, and conservation. The fund will provide tuition support for students at institutions in Kigali, ensuring that the

next generation of tourism leaders carries forward her vision.

Carmen was not only a pioneer in tourism: she was a devoted mother to her two sons, whom she adored. She often spoke of her dreams for their futures, just as she worked tirelessly to create opportunities for countless others.

Her passing is a profound loss, but her impact endures. In every young woman who rises in the tourism industry, in every East African traveler crossing borders with ease, in every professional she mentored : Carmen’s spirit lives on. Her belief in resilience, hope, and transformative leadership will continue to shape the industry she so passionately built.

Rest in power, Carmen. Your journey may have ended, but your influence will never fade.



The late Carmen Nibigira and her boys

Born in Burundi in 1978, Carmen’s passion for tourism was evident early on. Her academic journey took her to England, where she earned degrees in International Travel Management and Tourism Destination Management, before completing a Ph.D. at Clemson University, focusing on the political economy of tourism. She combined her academic expertise with hands-on leadership, shaping policy, institutions, and lives across East Africa and beyond.

As the inaugural CEO of the East African Tourism Platform (2013–2016), Carmen played a key role in creating the first single tourism visa for Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda : a landmark achievement that redefined regional travel. She also served as the Director General of the Burundi National Tourism Office and held senior roles in consultancy and policy advisory, including with Horwath HTL and the Mastercard Foundation’s Rwanda Programs team.



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DESTINATION NEWS

## Tourism & Aviation Connectivity Forum: Unlocking Africa's Air Travel Potential

Zanzibar will become the epicentre of a crucial dialogue on air connectivity in Sub-Saharan Africa as it hosts the Tourism & Aviation Connectivity Forum on Wednesday, 11 June 2025 at the Golden Tulip Zanzibar Airport. This high-impact event will bring together tourism and aviation leaders to tackle one of the most pressing issues in the region's travel sector—how tourism engagement can make or break airline route development.

### Bridging the Gap Between Tourism and Aviation

The forum seeks to address a longstanding challenge: the failure to fully integrate tourism strategies into aviation planning. Experts warn that when destinations do not align their tourism initiatives with aviation policies, they risk losing vital airline routes. Once lost, these routes are incredibly difficult to re-establish, significantly hampering a destination's tourism potential and economic growth. Aviation and tourism professionals alike agree that collaboration between these industries is no longer optional—it is imperative. The forum will offer a practical, hands-on approach to improving route development strategies, with a particular focus on leveraging the role of tourism in securing and sustaining flight routes.

### A High-Level Gathering of Industry Leaders

The event will feature insights from key stakeholders, including Tourism CEOs, airline executives, airport authorities, government officials, and destination marketing organisations. Their collective expertise will shape discussions around the role of tourism in route development, how national tourism boards and private tourism enterprises can influence airline decisions, how closer partnerships between airports and tourism agencies can enhance route viability, the role of destination marketing organisations in ensuring new routes thrive and maintain long-term sustainability, and how policymakers can create an enabling environment for better air connectivity.

### Who Should Attend?

The Tourism & Aviation Connectivity Forum is designed for key players in both industries, including tourism executives looking to drive and sustain successful route development, airline and airport representatives keen on enhancing route success through collaboration with tourism stakeholders, business developers and route planners seeking best practices for engaging with local tourism sectors, destination marketing organisations aiming to support long-term aviation partnerships, and government officials exploring strategies for fostering a collaborative environment between tourism and aviation to boost regional connectivity.

### The High Stakes of Air Connectivity in Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa faces unique challenges in air connectivity. Many countries have underdeveloped aviation networks, and airline route development is often dictated by factors beyond just demand. Regulatory restrictions, high operating costs, and insufficient tourism integration have all played a role in limiting Africa's aviation growth. However, industry experts argue that national tourism boards have a unique opportunity to drive new airline routes and spur economic expansion. A key lesson from last year's AviaDev Africa workshop in Namibia was that airline executives see enormous potential in African tourism, but they need more data and stronger partnerships with tourism authorities to make informed decisions about new routes. By fostering stronger collaboration between airlines, airports, and tourism bodies, this forum aims to transform the way Africa approaches air connectivity, ensuring more viable, profitable, and sustainable routes.

With tourism serving as a powerful economic driver across Africa, air connectivity remains the backbone of the industry. The Tourism & Aviation Connectivity Forum in Zanzibar is expected to be a game-changer, equipping stakeholders with the tools and strategies to revolutionize air travel across the continent.





## Brand Africa Initiative Advances as UN Tourism Concludes Strategic Discussions in Madrid



Elcia Grandcourt, Director of the UN Tourism Regional Department for Africa

As Africa continues to strengthen its position in the global tourism market, stakeholders across the continent have been taking deliberate steps to redefine the narrative surrounding its destinations. The UN Tourism Brand Africa initiative, a concerted effort to elevate Africa's image and competitiveness, has served as an ongoing platform for critical discussions, with each session building upon previous insights. The latest instalment of this initiative took place at the UN Tourism Headquarters in Madrid on January 24, 2025, ahead of the FITUR tourism trade fair.

This high-level brainstorming session brought together industry leaders, policymakers, and experts to refine strategies aimed at positioning Africa as a premier tourism destination. With negative stereotypes and structural challenges still impacting the continent's attractiveness, the session focused on actionable solutions to enhance Africa's visibility, strengthen its market appeal, and unlock investment opportunities within the sector.

Elcia Grandcourt, Director of the UN

Tourism Regional Department for Africa, set the stage by highlighting the progressive journey of Brand Africa. She traced its roots to the first regional conference held in Namibia in 2021 and the second session in Livingstone, Zambia, in 2024. Both events provided a foundation for structured discussions on rebranding Africa, with a strong emphasis on leveraging tourism as a driver of economic growth.

A key milestone in this journey was the launch of the Brand Africa Guidebook to Strengthen the Competitiveness of African Tourism in 2021. Developed in collaboration with Africa Tourism Partners, the guidebook has offered strategic direction for African countries, equipping them with practical tools to enhance their tourism brands. Grandcourt reiterated its relevance as a framework for long-term success.

Throughout the session, participants engaged in reflective discussions on critical challenges facing the African tourism sector. There was a consensus that, while progress has been made in streamlining visa processes, intra-African travel still presents hurdles. Improving connectivity and easing travel restrictions were recognized as essential factors in fostering regional tourism. Another focal point was the development of skills in branding and communication, particularly as digital marketing continues to play a pivotal role in tourism promotion. The need to equip professionals with advanced expertise in storytelling and digital branding was emphasized as a key driver for sectoral growth.

Sandra Carvão, Director of the UN Tourism Market Intelligence, Policies, and Competitiveness Department, underscored the power of digital

transformation in reshaping Africa's image. Quoting branding experts Al and Laura Ries, she stated, "Brand is a perception in the prospect's mind." Discussions highlighted the importance of understanding META's algorithm to optimize tourism engagement on social media, leveraging WhatsApp Business Messaging for targeted marketing, and utilizing artificial intelligence alongside immersive visual formats to showcase Africa's destinations.

A significant segment of the session was dedicated to Africa's growing focus on gastronomy tourism. Following the successful UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, in 2024, participants welcomed the announcement of a second forum set to take place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in March 2025. Grandcourt extended an open invitation to all delegates, emphasizing that African cuisine remains an integral element of the continent's tourism appeal.

The session concluded with a renewed sense of commitment toward a unified approach in strengthening Africa's global tourism positioning, attracting investments, and driving inclusive growth. As Grandcourt aptly noted, "Africa's story is ours to tell. Through strategic action and collaboration, we can shape a brand that reflects the continent's true potential."



Sandra Carvão, Director of the UN Tourism Market Intelligence, Policies, and Competitiveness Department

## Africa Showcase Southern Europe Concludes with Strategic Advancements, Strengthening Market Position for African Tourism

Africa Showcase Southern Europe has successfully concluded, marking a significant step in strengthening Africa's positioning in the Southern European travel market. Organized by On Show Solutions, the roadshow engaged key tourism stakeholders in Madrid, Paris, and Milan, facilitating direct interactions between African exhibitors and European buyers.

The event commenced in Madrid, where discussions centered on the evolving preferences of Spanish travellers. Traditionally drawn to Latin America, Spanish tourists are increasingly exploring African destinations. Maria Luisa Nogales, Director of Descubre Viajes, noted this shift, stating, "The Spanish market has just landed in Africa. Our natural way was South America, but now Morocco is the first, followed by Kenya and Tanzania." This growing interest presents a unique opportunity for Africa to expand its footprint in the Spanish market. However, affordability and air connectivity remain key considerations. Market professionals underscored the need for Africa to implement targeted promotional strategies to sustain this momentum.

Nogales further highlighted that Spanish travellers seek more than just luxury in Africa, emphasizing, "In Africa, the most important thing is not the number of stars on the gate. It's the location, the experience, and the people. Spanish travellers love human connection. We love to talk, we love music, we love food: and when people return from Africa, they fall in love with its soul."

Paris provided a dynamic platform for further engagement, where industry leaders explored the synergies between Africa's offerings and the expectations of the French travel market. The event emphasized the importance of immersive travel experiences, reinforcing Africa's appeal beyond wildlife and luxury lodges. Veronica Sarmiento, Director of Buscarne Viajes, pointed out that "Africa offers something rare: an exclusive yet immersive experience. It's not mass tourism; it's exclusive, relaxed, and intimate. It's perfect for honeymooners who want a mix of adventure, nature, and good food." She also noted a growing

interest in Uganda for chimpanzee trekking, despite the challenges of accessibility and cost. "Only the flights are far, and you need at least 10 to 12 days. It's not a weekend escape; it is a planned travel. That's why Africa needs to invest in promoting itself to the Spanish market," she stressed.

Milan, a critical hub for luxury and tailor-made travel, saw robust participation from Italian buyers. Discussions revolved around the exclusivity of African travel experiences and the importance of streamlining accessibility. Lidia Martinuzzi, a market expert from Spain and Italy, highlighted the crucial role of direct flights. "Both Spain and Italy don't fly into many southern African countries. There's no direct flight into Namibia, for example, and airlines are still negotiating partnerships." However, she noted that Ethiopian Airlines is bridging the gap. "They've started flying from Madrid to Addis Ababa, with connections to Windhoek, Maun, Zambia, and South Africa. More flights mean more growth." This reflects the direct correlation between airlift expansion and increased demand for African destinations. "We've seen a surge in travel to Kenya from Italy simply because of more charter flights," she added.

Sarmiento also emphasized that if Africa wants to attract more Spanish travellers, it must be proactive. "Africa must invest in media promotion, social media, TV ads, and direct outreach." She highlighted the continent's strong foundation but urged further marketing efforts. "Well, it's usually the Big Five, as we don't have them here. But beyond that, travellers also love the stunning scenery. It's completely

different. And the lodges, I think you've done a fantastic job. They are truly beautiful."

Nogales reinforced that while many Spanish travellers initially choose Africa for its wildlife, they return because of the culture and people. "When they come back, half of them need to return. They fall in love with Africa's soul."

The roadshow highlighted Africa's potential to capture a greater share of the Southern European market. Industry stakeholders emphasized the necessity of sustained investment in media promotion, strategic partnerships, and improved flight connectivity to enhance Africa's appeal. The success of Africa Showcase Southern Europe underscores the continent's capacity to position itself as a premier destination for European travellers seeking adventure, culture, and exclusivity.

Reflecting on the outcomes, Amanda Margison, co-owner of On Show Solutions, reaffirmed the significance of direct engagement in fostering long-term partnerships. "Being in these markets allows us to directly interact with the people driving Africa's tourism growth in Southern Europe," she remarked. Her sentiments echoed the broader consensus among stakeholders that such direct engagement is instrumental in shaping Africa's trajectory in the European travel market.

As the industry looks ahead, the insights gained from this showcase will serve as a foundation for future market expansion strategies, ensuring Africa's continued growth in the Southern European travel landscape.



## New Leadership Ushers in a New Era for Ghana's Tourism Sector

Ghana's tourism landscape is set for a transformative shift as President John Dramani Mahama unveils a fresh leadership team to drive the nation's tourism, culture and creative arts agenda.

The appointments of Hon. Dzifa Abla Gomashie as Minister for Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts, Maame Efua Sekyi-Aidoo Houadjeto as Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), and Prof. Kobby Mensah as Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana Tourism Development Company (GTDC) signal a renewed commitment to leveraging tourism as a catalyst for economic growth and cultural heritage preservation.

### Dzifa Gomashie takes the helm at the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts



A seasoned advocate for Ghana's tourism and creative arts industry, Dzifa Abla Gomashie returns to familiar territory as she assumes the role of Minister for Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts. As a former Deputy Minister in the same ministry during President Mahama's first administration, the Ketu South Member of Parliament brings a wealth of experience and a deep understanding of the sector's evolving dynamics.

Hon. Gomashie steps into the position at a critical juncture, where Ghana's tourism industry continues to benefit from the success of landmark initiatives such as the "Year of Return" and "Beyond the Return." These campaigns have significantly boosted international arrivals, and her leadership is expected to build upon this momentum. Central to her agenda will be the implementation of "The Black Star Experience," the new government initiative designed to elevate Ghana's standing as a premier global tourism and cultural hub. This initiative is aimed at expanding tourism offerings, enhancing cultural experiences, and

fostering international collaborations that celebrate Ghana's rich heritage.

### Maame Efua Sekyi-Aidoo Houadjeto to lead Ghana Tourism Authority



In another major appointment, President Mahama has named Maame Efua Sekyi-Aidoo Houadjeto as the new Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA). She succeeds Akwasi Agyeman, who recently resigned, and is expected to steer GTA toward greater innovation and operational efficiency.

A political figure and marketing communications expert, Maame Efua brings a diverse skill set to her new role. She was a parliamentary candidate aspirant for the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in the Mfantseman Constituency for the 2024 general elections and a former Deputy Women's Organiser of the NDC. With a background in event management and marketing communications, she has led Image Consortium (IC), an event planning firm, for several years.

GTA, the primary agency responsible for tourism promotion, marketing, and quality assurance, has played a pivotal role in Ghana's tourism sector. Under her leadership, GTA is expected to build upon the successes of the "Year of Return" and "Beyond the Return" campaigns while aligning with the government's ambitious "The Black Star Experience." Her experience in strategic marketing and event planning is anticipated to strengthen the agency's branding efforts and enhance the promotion of Ghana as a top-tier destination.

### Prof. Kobby Mensah appointed CEO of Ghana Tourism Development Company

President Mahama has also appointed marketing expert Prof. Kobby Mensah as the new Chief Executive Officer of the



Ghana Tourism Development Company (GTDC). A distinguished faculty member at the University of Ghana Business School (UGBS), Prof. Mensah's appointment is widely viewed as a strategic move to bolster investment in the tourism sector and promote Ghana's tourism potential on a global scale.

Prof. Mensah is a leading figure in tourism marketing, strategic branding, and investment promotion. His extensive academic and consultancy experience has made him a key player in shaping Ghana's tourism landscape. One of his notable contributions includes spearheading the Destination Legon Tourism Marketing Exhibition, a pioneering initiative that merges academic theory with industry practice, allowing students to craft compelling marketing campaigns for Ghanaian tourist attractions.

At GTDC, his role will focus on revitalising the institution, attracting investments, and enhancing Ghana's tourism infrastructure. Industry stakeholders anticipate that his expertise in marketing and destination branding will help reposition Ghana as a competitive player in the global tourism sector.

### A new chapter for Ghana's tourism and creative arts industry

The appointment of these seasoned professionals is expected to inject fresh energy into Ghana's tourism sector, driving growth and innovation. With Hon. Dzifa Gomashie leading the Ministry, Maame Efua Sekyi-Aidoo Houadjeto at the helm of the GTA and Prof. Kobby Mensah steering GTDC, Ghana is determined to capitalise on its rich cultural heritage and growing international appeal as industry players and tourism enthusiasts alike monitor closely to see how this leadership team navigates the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

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Abubacarr Camara, Director General of the Gambia Tourism Board

## Gambia Positioned as a Top Destination with New Tourism Offerings

Gambia was among the African countries present at this year's FITUR, showcasing its diverse tourism products and unique attractions.

In an interview with *VoyagesAfric*, the Director General of the Gambia Tourism Board, Abubacarr Camara, highlighted the strides being made to enhance the country's tourism sector.

"The Gambia is really promising in the sense that every year, we are improving our product," he said.

### Enhancing Gambia's Beaches and Tourism Infrastructure

Camara elaborated on efforts to improve Gambia's beaches, reinforcing their status as some of the finest in Africa.

"One of the things I am happy to share is that we have worked tirelessly to ensure our beaches are among the most beautiful in Africa. We are investing heavily in keeping them exceptionally clean. In addition, we are enhancing their natural beauty by planting over a thousand coconut trees to ensure they remain well-maintained," he enthused.

He also spoke on strategic investments and partnerships that are shaping Gambia's tourism and hospitality landscape, particularly in the hinterland.

"We have attracted significant investments in the hinterland. One example is an investor who developed Ngala Lodge."

Further emphasising the role of investors, he added:

"One of our key investors is Metze Hotel, a valuable addition to our industry. We are pleased to see more investments moving beyond the coastal areas and promoting tourism in new regions."

### Diversifying Gambia's Tourism Beyond Sun and Sand

The Director General reaffirmed Gambia's commitment to diversifying its tourism sector, expanding beyond traditional beach tourism.

"We understand the need for diversification. We are moving beyond sun-and-sea tourism and embracing eco-tourism, nature-based tourism, cultural tourism, and river-based tourism."

*"One of the things I am happy to share is that we have worked tirelessly to ensure our beaches are among the most beautiful in Africa. We are investing heavily in keeping them exceptionally clean. In addition, we are enhancing their natural beauty by planting over a thousand coconut trees to ensure they remain well-maintained."*

He urged everyone to take part in promoting Gambia as a premier travel destination and experience the country's evolving tourism landscape.

"Tourism is everyone's business. Without people, there would be no tourism. We invite you to come and experience these new products because seeing is believing."



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## Maiden Abidjan International Tourism and Leisure Trade Fair (SITLA) set for May 2025

The Maiden Abidjan International Tourism and Leisure trade fair (Salon International du Tourisme et des Loisirs d'Abidjan (SITLA) is set to take place from May 1 to May 4, 2025, at the Parc des Expositions d'Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. This premier event will bring together tourism and leisure professionals, investors, and the general public to explore industry trends, forge strategic partnerships, and promote African destinations.

Organized by the Ministry of Tourism and Leisure of Côte d'Ivoire, SITLA serves as a hub for national and international stakeholders, providing an environment for innovation, networking, and business development. The event aims to:

- Promote tourism and leisure offers to a diverse audience.
- Facilitate partnerships among industry professionals.
- Showcase emerging trends and technologies in tourism.
- Highlight Africa's cultural and tourism potential.
- Enhance the visibility of regional and international businesses.

SITLA is expected to attract 100,000 visitors and will feature 25 participating countries, reinforcing its international reach. The event will include:

- Exhibition Spaces: Featuring tourism, leisure, travel, and crafts.
- Ministerial and Thematic Conferences: Discussions on innovation and industry challenges.
- Business Meetings (B2B, B2C, B2G): Opportunities for strategic partnerships.
- Training Workshops: Capacity-building sessions for professionals.
- Cultural and Leisure Activities: Traditional games, musical performances, and culinary experiences at the Gastronomic Village.

For exhibitors, SITLA offers direct access to the growing West African tourism market, enabling businesses to increase visibility and engage with an international audience. It provides an opportunity to establish connections with strategic partners and investors, facilitating business expansion and collaboration.

For professional visitors, the event



Standou Fofana, Minister of Tourism of Côte d'Ivoire

presents a chance to explore innovative solutions in tourism and leisure, attend insightful thematic conferences, and identify concrete business opportunities.

For the general public, SITLA provides an immersive experience into the world of tourism and leisure. Visitors will have the chance to discover new travel destinations, engage in cultural and recreational activities, and enjoy unique experiences suitable for families and individuals alike.

With a focus on "Technological Innovations: A Factor in the Development of Tourism and Leisure," SITLA 2025 will explore the role of digital transformation, smart tourism solutions, and sustainable innovations in shaping the future of the industry.



## The Rise of AI-Powered Electronic Travel Authorizations: A Game-Changer for Border Security and Tourism

by Tom Marten

Electronic travel authorizations (eTAs) have emerged as a transformative innovation in an era where seamless travel and robust security must coexist. South Africa, following in the footsteps of Kenya and Seychelles, recently confirmed its intention to adopt an eTA system—further cementing Africa's shift toward digital border management. This move reflects a broader global trend where eTAs are becoming the gold standard for balancing security and facilitation at international borders.

The adoption of eTAs marks a paradigm shift in border management. Traditionally, travelers were either required to obtain a visa—a process often burdened with lengthy applications and cumbersome paperwork—or allowed visa-free entry, which posed security challenges due to limited pre-arrival screening. Both approaches had inefficiencies: visa processes discouraged travel, while visa-free entry created bottlenecks and security risks as travelers had to be vetted on arrival. The introduction of fully digital eTAs offers a more efficient alternative, enabling authorities to collect just the right amount of traveler information for thorough risk assessment before arrival. When well implemented, an eTA application can be completed online in under 10 minutes, offering a streamlined and cost-effective solution compared to traditional visas. This shift not only enhances security but also significantly improves the traveler experience.

*“The adoption of eTAs marks a paradigm shift in border management. Traditionally, travelers were either required to obtain a visa—a process often burdened with lengthy applications and cumbersome paperwork—or allowed visa-free entry, which posed security challenges due to limited pre-arrival screening”*



South Africa's move to AI-driven eTAs aligns with global best practices, particularly among nations that prioritize both security and tourism. Countries such as Canada, the U.S., New Zealand, Australia, the UK, and the European Union (which will launch its eTA system in 2025) have already integrated eTAs into their border control frameworks, requiring all visa-free travelers to submit key information in advance. As Africa strengthens its focus on economic development and interconnectivity, the expansion of eTAs across the continent will likely foster greater regional and international cooperation.

A major driver behind the rise of eTAs is their proven impact on tourism and business travel. AI-powered solutions, such as those developed by Travizory Border Security, are helping governments worldwide revolutionize border management. In Seychelles, the introduction of an eTA led to an **84% reduction in arrival processing times**, while Kenya's transition from an outdated eVisa to a modern eTA contributed to a **90% decrease in application times** and a **21% increase in inbound tourism**. As a premier global tourism destination, South Africa stands to gain immensely from a similar digital transformation. By simplifying entry procedures, the country can attract more high-value visitors, stimulating growth in the hospitality, retail, and conference industries. Additionally, AI-driven eTAs

help reduce congestion at airports, improving traveler flow and enhancing South Africa's competitiveness on the global tourism stage.

However, the growing adoption of eTAs also brings critical considerations, particularly around **cybersecurity and data privacy**. AI-driven systems process vast amounts of personal information, necessitating stringent data protection measures to maintain public trust. **Travizory's Biometric eTA system**, for example, is fully **GDPR and SOC 2 compliant**, ensuring that traveler data remains secure at all times.

As eTAs become the new global standard, countries that embrace this technology early will gain a strategic advantage—enhancing border security while fostering a more seamless, efficient, and welcoming travel experience.



Tom Marten

## FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Seychelles 2025™: Paradise Arena Readies for World Event

The countdown to the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Seychelles 2025™ is well and truly under way! The tournament will take place from May 1st to May 11th, preparations are continuing in Roche Caiman, Seychelles, to welcome the world's top beach soccer teams.

In the spirit of sustainability, the Local Organising Committee is repurposing the same stadium used at the previous FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in the UAE.

A container ship carrying the state-of-the-art stadium will depart Dubai on February 16th and is expected to arrive at Victoria Port on February 26th. The base structure, made of cement and sand from Assumption island, has already been laid, setting the stage for the 3 500-seater stadium—the same impressive venue used in last year's FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup. Once it arrives, the installation, and final assembly will commence. Assembly at previous venue took approx. 3 weeks, giving us ample time for readiness for the event.

The Seychelles government has played a vital role in ensuring the tournament's seamless organization. It has every confidence in the Local Organising Committee's ability to deliver a world-class tournament. Their support has

been instrumental in coordinating efforts across various sectors, from infrastructure development to public services, guaranteeing a smooth and enjoyable experience for both participants and visitors. This spirit of collaboration has been key in fostering national unity and pride as Seychelles prepares to shine on the world stage.

Beyond the thrilling matches, fans can look forward to an exciting Fan Experience area adjacent to the stadium. This lively space will serve as a hub for soccer enthusiasts, offering a mix of entertainment, kid-friendly activities, food vendors, shopping stalls, and interactive games. It promises to be a vibrant gathering spot where fans can celebrate their love for the sport in a festive atmosphere.

Seychelles, renowned for its stunning natural beauty and warm hospitality, is set to deliver an unforgettable tournament. The local organizing committee, volunteers, and support staff are dedicated to meticulously plan every detail—from transportation logistics to hospitality services—to ensure a world-class event.

The tournament will feature elite beach soccer teams such as Italy, Portugal, Spain, Belarus, Senegal, Mauritania & Tahiti and provide a platform to showcase



Seychelles' rich culture and traditions. Special events, artistic performances, and community driven initiatives will be woven into the schedule, offering international visitors a truly immersive experience.

Sustainability remains at the heart of this event, with eco-friendly initiatives such as waste reduction, recycling programs, and the use of sustainable materials being actively implemented. Local businesses and artisans are also being supported, ensuring the tournament's economic benefits extend throughout the community.

First held in 2005, the 2025 edition of the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup™ will be the 13th instalment of a tournament that has been held every two years since 2009. Following outstanding events held in the AFC (Dubai in 2009 and 2024), Concacaf (Bahamas in 2017), CONMEBOL (Paraguay in 2019), OFC (Tahiti in 2013) and UEFA (Italy in 2011, Portugal in 2015 and Russia in 2021) regions and after the 2025 edition, the tournament will have been hosted by every confederation in the space of just 12 years.



## Africa's luxury tourism boom: Penny Fraser discusses trends, opportunities innovations & ILTM Africa 2025

In the inaugural episode of the VA Tourism Podcast for 2025, Kojo Bentum-Williams sat down with Penny Fraser, Sales, Sponsorship & Partnerships Director for RX Africa, to explore the transformative trends shaping Africa's luxury tourism market. Fraser, who oversees flagship events like Africa Travel Week and ILTM Africa, shared insights into the continent's growing appeal as a high-end travel destination, the rise of sustainable and authentic experiences, and the innovative strategies driving the sector forward.

### Africa's rising position in the global luxury market

Fraser emphasized that the global appetite for luxury tourism is on the rise, with African nations increasingly tapping into this lucrative market. "Globally, the appetite for luxury tourism is continuing to grow, and many African countries are tapping into this profitable market by offering tailored travel experiences that combine entertainment, relaxation, and exclusivity," she said.

The global tourism sector has experienced a revival in the post-COVID era, with increased focus on health and safety fueling demand for luxury travel experiences. Fraser highlighted a significant shift in consumer behavior: "Post-COVID, we've seen a revitalization

in the global tourism sector, with heightened awareness of health and safety driving interest in high-end travel options. One significant trend we've observed is the shift from individuals traveling for luxury to families traveling together. In 2021 alone, family-friendly tour bookings increased by over 200%, reflecting a desire for shared experiences after the pandemic."

Africa's luxury tourism market is thriving, with international arrivals reaching 96% of pre-pandemic levels in 2023, compared to a global average of 88%. Countries like Mauritius, Seychelles, and Kenya are leading the charge, while emerging destinations such as Rwanda and Benin are making significant strides. Fraser noted, "Africa stands out in the luxury market because of its blend of exclusive experiences—personalized safaris, cultural immersion, and secluded beaches. As the global luxury sector grows, Africa is well-positioned to take advantage of these opportunities."

### Redefining luxury beyond infrastructure to authentic experiences

Fraser challenged the notion that luxury tourism is solely about high-end infrastructure. "Luxury in tourism isn't just about physical infrastructure; it's about the experience," she explained. Africa's ability to offer authentic cultural encounters—such as visits to remote tribes, exploration of ancient historical sites, and eco-luxury experiences—sets it apart.

She elaborated, "Africa offers something truly unique—exclusive safari experiences, cultural immersion, and pristine beaches. Imagine visiting remote tribes, exploring ancient historical sites like the pyramids in Egypt, or enjoying the breathtaking coastlines of Durban and Cape Town. These are experiences that resonate deeply with luxury travelers."

Sustainability and conservation are also central to Africa's luxury tourism narrative. Fraser emphasized the rising trend of eco-luxury, as many upscale resorts combine premium experiences with sustainable tourism practices. "Many high-end resorts

are now focusing on sustainability, blending luxury with responsible tourism to preserve the environment and support local communities. It's about ensuring that the impact on the community and environment doesn't jeopardize the future of the business," she said.

### Opportunities for growth and SME inclusion

While African destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are beginning to capitalize on the luxury niche, Fraser believes there is still significant room for growth. "There's still a lot of room for growth in Africa's luxury tourism market. While DMOs are starting to capitalize on the continent's unique offerings, there's a need for more education and support to fully unlock this potential," she noted.

A key focus for RX Africa is creating opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to thrive in the luxury tourism space. Fraser explained, "We are deeply committed to supporting SMEs in the luxury tourism space. At ILTM Africa, we provide platforms for small businesses to showcase their unique products, from luxury handbags made from recycled plastic to wine brands that support conservation initiatives. These pop-ups not only introduce sustainable choices but also give SMEs the opportunity to engage with buyers and larger hotel groups."

Through initiatives like luxury pop-ups and tailored networking opportunities, SMEs can integrate into the luxury tourism value chain. Fraser emphasized, "Our goal is to help these businesses grow and integrate into the luxury tourism value chain, ensuring that Africa's diverse offerings are represented on the global stage."

### ILTM Africa 2025: innovations & expectations

Looking ahead to ILTM Africa 2025, Fraser shared exciting innovations aimed at enhancing the event's impact. The introduction of "In Conversations With" sessions will provide industry professionals with insights into the latest trends and challenges in luxury travel. Fraser described the sessions as "a relaxed, insightful chat environment



for industry professionals to learn and discuss growing trends and key insights into luxury travel within Africa.”

The event will also feature a tailored luxury networking schedule, offering curated experiences across Cape Town. Fraser explained, “We take attendees through the city of Cape Town, showcasing its cuisine, culture, and stunning venues. Everything from their flight details to appointment schedules is meticulously planned to ensure a seamless experience.”

Advanced business matching technology will facilitate efficient networking and collaboration. “Our platform pairs travel trade professionals with relevant partners, ensuring meaningful connections,” Fraser said. Additionally, ILTM Africa will promote cross-border partnerships, strengthening Africa’s presence on the global luxury travel map.

The 2025 edition will be held at Cape Town’s Norval Foundation, a stunning venue that will feature African art exhibits, creating a unique backdrop for networking and discussions. Fraser

added, “The Norval Foundation is a beautiful international museum, and the networking spaces will be surrounded by African art exhibits, making it a truly inspiring setting.”

Beyond the event itself, ILTM Africa offers year-round engagement opportunities, including webinars and resource sharing, to ensure sustained value for participants. Fraser noted, “We’re offering continuous engagement opportunities to ensure that the impact of ILTM Africa extends beyond the three-day event.”

## Africa Youth Tourism Innovation Summit 2025 Launched in Nairobi, Kenya

Africa Tourism Partners alongside the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife Kenya, UN Tourism, AfCFTA, BDO, TEAMS Africa and Kenya Tourism Board have successfully launched the 7th Africa Youth in Tourism Summit (AYTIS) 2025 ([www.youthtourismsummit.com](http://www.youthtourismsummit.com)).

Held on the 29th of January 2025 at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), the launch was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, Kenya Tourism Board, Kenya based tourism private sector associations and stakeholders and members of the media. Over 200 delegates attended the launch both physically and online, contributing to the huge success of the launch.

In a speech delivered by Karanja Waigi, Director for Planning in the Cabinet Secretary’s office, on behalf of Hon. Rebecca Miano, EGH, Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife, Kenya, Hon. Rebecca Miano described

the hosting of the upcoming 7th Africa Youth in Tourism Summit by Kenya as an opportunity for empowerment, innovation, and inclusion.

“Today’s launch sets the stage for the upcoming 7th Africa Youth in Tourism Summit, set to take place here in Nairobi, from June 10 to 13, 2025. This will be more than just a gathering, but a movement. It will showcase the immense potential of intra-Africa trade in tourism services and highlight the vital role of the youth in shaping the future of this industry”, added Hon. Rebecca Miano (CS).

Nairobi will for the first time host the Africa Youth in Tourism Innovation Summit in alignment Kenya’s Youth in Tourism and conservation initiative that was launched by Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife in the Month of December 2024. The initiative is part of the Ministry’s commitment to empower young people as innovators, job creators, and leaders

in the tourism and conservation sectors.

In addition to the Summit (AYTIS) program, the event will be characterized by desktop exhibitions of youth-led tourism businesses, business-to-business networking opportunities, career guidance and hosted buyer programs. This is all in the spirit of fostering collaboration among tour operators, transport service providers, educational institutions and technology start-ups.

As the world prepares to meet in Kenya for the 7th Africa Youth in Tourism Innovation Summit and Challenge, the destination offers more than just wildlife and beaches but also highlights the continent’s rich cultural heritage, dynamic cities, and diverse experiences. Registrations for participation and challenge entries are now open on <https://youthtourismsummit.com>. Submissions for the challenge close on 28 February 2025.



## ‘SA is prepared for G20’ – De Lille

by Adele Mackenzie, TourismUpdate

Hosting the 20th G20 Summit in Johannesburg on November 22 and 23 will go a long way towards strengthening the tourism sector’s contribution to economic growth and job creation numbers, said Minister of Tourism Patricia de Lille in an op ed for Tourism Update.

Around 40 heads of state are expected to attend, she highlighted. “Together, members (G20, EU and AU) account for around 85% of global GDP, 75% international trade and two thirds of the world’s population.”

Throughout the course of this year, over 135 G20 meetings will be held throughout the country – including the Tourism Ministers G20 Meeting in Mpumalanga in September.

De Lille pointed to other successfully hosted international events in South Africa – including the 15th BRICS Summit in 2023 – and declared the country is ready and excited to host delegates from all over the world and showcase all the diverse and unique tourism offerings across all nine provinces.

### Addressing barriers to entry

“Air capacity recovery has been solid for South Africa. Currently, there are active international routes connecting 72 cities worldwide, serviced by 55 airlines, offering over 7.8 million seats across over 52 000 flights in 2024,” she added.

“On the domestic front, capacity has rebounded with 18 million seats in 2024 and 4.2 million seats already projected for the first quarter of 2025.”

Furthermore, on December 4 last year, Cabinet approved the Route Development Marketing Strategy to be implemented by the Department of Tourism and the private sector.

In his State of the Nation Address last week, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that over 90% of the backlog of more than 300 000 visa applications had been cleared. “These changes send a strong message that

“**Air capacity recovery has been solid for South Africa. Currently, there are active international routes connecting 72 cities worldwide, serviced by 55 airlines, offering over 7.8 million seats across over 52 000 flights in 2024**”

South Africa is open for business and tourism.”

He also said hosting the G20 is an opportunity to place the needs of Africa and the rest of the Global South more firmly on the international development agenda. “Our G20 Presidency is a valuable opportunity for South Africa to advance efforts towards greater global economic growth and sustainable development.”

The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) is offering free grading throughout February to establishments that have not yet been graded or where grading has lapsed for longer than three years so that they will be able to benefit from G20 visitors.

Bronwen Auret, Chief Quality Assurance Officer for the TGCSA, said: “We are

going to be welcoming guests from all over the world and we need to make sure that we are ready to receive them.”

She said grading is a quality assurance and, most importantly, a promise to visitors who will include world leaders, their support teams, the media and tour operators, among others.

### The road to G20 for business owners

Although the benefits for the country are clear, it is unclear how tourism business owners could take direct advantage of these benefits.

In a recent informal poll, conducted by Tourism Update, an overwhelming majority (78%) of readers said they would like to see more platforms linking South Africa’s hosting of the myriad G20 meetings with specific tourism opportunities.

Speaking at the official launch of Meetings Africa two weeks ago, Glenton de Kock, Chief Executive Officer of the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry, agreed. “We need platforms that link G20 delegates to business travel suppliers.”

At the Meetings Africa 2025 launch, De Lille said she will ensure there is a G20 information desk at the event.





Hon. Barbara Rwodzi, Minister of Tourism and Hospitality Industry, Zimbabwe (R) and Hon. Vera Kamtukule, Minister of Tourism, Malawi (L) with UN Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili



H.E. Sofiane Tekaya – Minister of Tourism, Tunisia with UN Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili

## African Ministers applaud UN Tourism Secretary-General for commitment to advancing Tourism on the continent

African Ministers of Tourism have commended UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili for his unwavering dedication to promoting tourism across the continent. This recognition was expressed during a high-level bilateral meetings of various delegations with the UN Tourism Chief at the UN Tourism headquarters in Madrid, coinciding with FITUR 2025 and the organization's 50th anniversary.

The various discussions focused on strengthening regional collaboration, enhancing investment opportunities, and positioning Africa as a competitive and sustainable global tourism destination.

The distinguished delegation of African Ministers and officials in attendance included:

- **H.E. Abdoulie Jobe** – Minister for Tourism and Culture, The Gambia
- **Hon. Vera Kamtukule** – Minister of Tourism, Malawi
- **Hon. Márcio De Jesus Lopes Daniel** – Minister of Tourism, Angola

- **Hon. Barbara Rwodzi** – Minister of Tourism and Hospitality Industry, Zimbabwe
- **H.E. Didier Mpambia** – Minister of Tourism, DR Congo
- **H.E. Marie-France Lydie Hélène Pongault** – Minister of Tourism, Congo Brazzaville
- **Dr. Pindi Chana** – Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism, Tanzania
- **H.E. Viviane Dewa** – Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts, Madagascar
- **H.E. Sofiane Tekaya** – Minister of Tourism, Tunisia

The meetings reaffirmed Africa's collective vision for a more integrated and thriving tourism sector, emphasizing the importance of strategic partnerships and investment to drive sustainable growth.

African Ministers celebrate milestones and strengthen commitments to Tourism development

Country-Specific Commitments and Initiatives



Márcio De Jesus Lopes Daniel, Minister of Tourism, Angola with UN Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili

**Angola:** Minister Márcio De Jesus Lopes Daniel reaffirmed Angola's commitment to hosting an ICAO event and enhancing air connectivity. Plans are also in place to align its investment guidelines with an upcoming tourism fair in October. Additionally, Angola is exploring the establishment of a tourism academy focused on education and the expansion of its hospitality sector.

**Gambia:** Minister Abdoulie Jobe emphasized Gambia's dedication to technical collaboration with UN Tourism, particularly in setting up a tourism satellite account.



H.E. Viviane Dewa, Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts, Madagascar with UN Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili

**Madagascar:** Minister Viviane Dewa highlighted Madagascar's focus on technical cooperation, the revision of its tourism law, and the leveraging of regional frameworks such as the Vanilla Islands initiative in the Indian Ocean. The country is also prioritizing the growth of its handicraft sector and capitalizing on expanded flight connections through Emirates.

**Tunisia:** Minister Soufiane Tekaya reaffirmed Tunisia's long-term collaboration with UN Tourism, particularly in investment guidelines and training initiatives. Tunisia is focused on benchmarking best practices, expanding accessible tourism opportunities, and integrating technical projects from other nations.

**Zimbabwe:** Minister Barbara Rwodzi emphasized Zimbabwe's success in hosting the 1st UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy in July 2024 and its commitment to establishing the

Africa International Tourism Academy for Culinary Arts in partnership with UN Tourism. Additionally, Zimbabwe will host the Committee on Tourism and Sustainability meeting in September 2025.

**Tanzania:** The Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism Dr. Pindi Chana signed an official agreement to host the 2nd UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism in Dar es Salaam. Tanzania aims to strengthen culinary tourism by fostering collaboration between African and European training centers and upskilling local chefs.

**Malawi:** Minister Vera Kamtukule expressed gratitude for UN Tourism's support and emphasized the need for a stronger branding and communication strategy to elevate Malawi's unique tourism offerings globally. Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili commended the country's efforts to integrate tourism into its Agriculture, Tourism, and Mining (ATM) strategy.

### Strengthening inclusive and accessible Tourism

The discussions highlighted the importance of making African destinations more inclusive and accessible. Ministers explored innovative approaches to improving tourism infrastructure to ensure equitable access for all visitors, aligning with UN Tourism's broader agenda of promoting inclusivity as a pillar of sustainable tourism development.



H.E. Marie-France Lydie Hélène Pongault, Minister of Tourism, Congo Brazzaville with UN Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili

### UN Tourism Secretary-General applauds Africa's vision

Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili commended the leadership and vision of African Ministers, emphasizing their commitment to transforming tourism into a key driver of economic and social progress.

"Africa's tourism potential is vast, and through strategic collaboration, we can unlock opportunities that benefit local communities and the global tourism landscape," he remarked.

With a collective push for investment, infrastructure development, and strategic partnerships, African nations are taking bold steps to position themselves as competitive, resilient, and sustainable global tourism destinations.



## Achraf Fayda Appointed CEO of Moroccan National Tourism Office

The Moroccan National Tourism Office (MNTO) has announced the appointment of Achraf Fayda as its new Chief Executive Officer.

With over two decades of experience in marketing and strategic leadership, Mr. Fayda brings a wealth of expertise from globally renowned companies such as Coca-Cola and Centrale Danone.

A distinguished alumnus of the International Institute for Higher Education in Morocco (IIHEM) with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Economics, Mr. Fayda further honed his leadership skills at Harvard Business School's prestigious executive program.

His career includes a stellar tenure at Coca-Cola, where he spearheaded impactful marketing initiatives across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region from 2003 to 2021. More recently,

his role as Chief Marketing Officer at Centrale Danone in 2022 proved transformative, as he played a pivotal role in driving the company's successful business recovery in 2023.

Under Mr. Fayda's leadership, MNTO aims to enhance Morocco's position as a premier global tourism destination. His proven ability to foster growth and innovation in competitive markets is expected to align seamlessly with the office's strategic goals.

Fatim-Zahra Ammor, Minister of Tourism, Handicraft and Social and Solidarity Economy commenting on Fayda's new role said, "I'm thrilled to extend a warm welcome to Achraf Fayda as he begins his journey as the new CEO of the Moroccan National Tourism Office today!

Achraf brings a wealth of experience and fresh perspectives to this role, and



"I'm confident that under his leadership, Moroccan tourism will continue to thrive and innovate, propelling Morocco towards our ambitious goal of becoming a top 15 global destination."

"To Achraf Fayda, I wish you the very best as you embark on this new chapter. Your success is our success, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact you'll make."

## ETA requirements no longer needed by African visitors to Kenya



Kenya will allow citizens of nearly all African countries to visit without needing prior authorisation, according to a new directive by the cabinet.

Last year, Kenya introduced a "visa-free" policy that required most visitors to apply online for authorisation before leaving their country. But the introduction of the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA), which replaced the visa requirement for all visitors, was criticised as a "visa under another name".

On Tuesday, a cabinet statement said the ETA would be dropped for "all African countries except Somalia and Libya – due to security concerns". It said this was part of "efforts to support open skies policies and tourism growth" and "promote regional integration and ease travel across the continent".

Despite introducing the ETA, Kenya

fares worse in the latest ranking of how open it is to visitors, dropping 17 places to 46th out of 54 nations in the 2024 Africa Visa Openness Index. Several African countries have tried to ease travel requirements for visitors from elsewhere on the continent in recent years, with studies showing it is often easier for citizens of Western countries to visit.

Earlier this year, Ghana said all African passport holders would now be able to visit without needing a visa. African visitors to Rwanda also do not need a visa to enter the country. The move to facilitate travel within the continent is also being pushed by the African Union (AU).

Under the updated system, citizens of most African countries will be allowed to enter Kenya and stay ETA-free for up to two months. Members of the East African Community, which include Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi, can however stay for up to six months in line with the bloc's policy.

Kenya also says it will introduce an enhanced process "allowing travellers to receive approval instantly" and a maximum processing time of 72 hours. It is not clear when this will take effect. Several ministries have been tasked to propose guidelines within a week to

improve "travellers experience at all Kenyan airports", according to the cabinet statement.

Before the introduction of the ETA, visitors from more than 40 countries including several from Africa, were able to arrive in Kenya, get a stamp in their passport and enter without paying anything.

All travellers must now apply and pay for an ETA at least three days before their trip to Kenya, unless they are citizens of an exempted country. The ETA fee is \$30 (£24) and valid for 90 days. The policy has faced criticism with some noting that it could make it more difficult for potential visitors to come to the country.

Kenya has indicated there was a security element to the introduction of the new system, with the government spokesman telling the BBC last year that it was necessary for vetting travellers. The country has been targeted by al-Shabab jihadist militants from neighbouring Somalia in several notorious attacks. On Tuesday, the government said it was also introducing a system that would enhance "pre-screening, strengthen security, and streamline passenger processing at entry points".

Source: BBC

## Namibia Tourism Board Strengthens Growth in the Spanish Market

The Namibia Tourism Board (NTB) continued its strategic marketing efforts in Europe by participating in the Feria Internacional de Turismo (FITUR) in Madrid, Spain.

As one of the largest and most influential global tourism events, FITUR attracts industry professionals and key players from international markets, including Latin America and beyond.

Marking its second consecutive participation, the NTB, alongside six private sector partners engaged in high-level discussions with the travel trade and showcased Namibia's unique tourism offerings during the consumer-focused weekend.

The Namibia Tourism Board delegation featured representatives from Gondwana Lodges, Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR), Nature Friend Safaris, The RestDest, Oipuka Kalahari Tailor-Made Tours, and Matiti Tours.

Over 120 buyers and visitors stopped by the Namibia stand to interact with exhibitors and explore potential travel opportunities.

*"We're encouraged by the positive feedback from the market and motivated to continue our efforts. Our private sector partners had productive meetings and promising leads, which we hope will help us expand interest not just in the Spanish market, but also in the broader Latino markets"*



Reflecting on the event's impact, Charmaine Matheus, Acting CEO of the Namibia Tourism Board, shared her observations with VoyagesAfric, expressing satisfaction with the continued strong interest in Namibia from both the Spanish travel trade and consumer markets.

Namibia's presence at FITUR reinforces its commitment to expanding its footprint in the European tourism market while strengthening partnerships with key industry stakeholders.

"We're encouraged by the positive feedback from the market and motivated to continue our efforts. Our private sector partners had productive meetings and promising leads, which we hope will help us expand interest not just in the Spanish market, but also in the broader Latino markets," Charmaine said

According to Charmaine Matheus, participating in FITUR is a strategic

move aimed at establishing valuable connections with key travel agents from Europe and Latin America, offering them an opportunity to explore Namibia's diverse tourism experiences.

As part of NTB's mission in Spain, Ms. Matheus, alongside Ephraim, a board member, and Zebulun Chicalu, Director of Tourism & Gaming at Namibia's Ministry of Forestry, Wildlife, and Tourism, participated in the UN Tourism CEOs Brand Africa brainstorming session held at the organization's headquarters.

The 45th edition of FITUR, organized by IFEMA MADRID, concluded with remarkable participation and attendance figures, exceeding expectations with an estimated 255,000 visitors.

The first three days alone welcomed 155,000 professionals, marking significant growth for the global event.

Earlier this year, NTB also took part in the Matka Travel Fair in Finland, reinforcing Namibia's commitment to positioning itself as the top African destination for Northern Europe.

Matka Travel Fair, the largest tourism event in Northern Europe, attracts both travel industry professionals and consumers, offering the latest insights on travel trends and destination highlights.

Through these strategic global engagements, Namibia Tourism Board continues to strengthen its international presence, fostering partnerships that drive sustainable growth in the country's tourism sector.

## Cabo Verde names new Tourism & Transport Minister

The Government of Cabo Verde has announced the appointment of Dr. Jose Luis Sá Nogueira as the new Minister of Tourism and Transport.

Dr. Jose Luis Sá Nogueira replaces Dr. Carlos Duarte Santos who resigned from the government.

His appointment comes at a time when the country is focusing on strengthening its tourism and transport sectors as key drivers of economic growth and regional connectivity.

With a wealth of experience in economic planning, foreign investment promotion, and aviation management, Dr. Sá Nogueira's leadership is expected to bring a strategic edge to Cape Verde's tourism landscape.

Dr. Sá Nogueira holds a Bachelor of Science in Economic Sciences, specializing in Planning and Economics of Developing Countries. His professional training spans diverse areas, including Managing the Project Cycle and Economic Studies on Export Projects by CNUCED, as well as Promotion Techniques and Evaluation of Foreign Investment Projects by the Irish

Industrial Development Authority (IDA). His expertise extends across multiple sectors, having held key positions in fisheries, tourism, hospitality, and foreign direct investment promotion.

His extensive career includes serving as President of the Investment and Export Promotion Center (PROMEX), Director of the Privatization Office, and Director General of the Oasis Group in Brazil. Additionally, he has played a significant role in aviation, serving as TACV Delegate in Brazil and later as President of the Board of Directors of TACV. More recently, from 2019 to 2021, he worked as an Air Transport Consultant under the World Bank-funded Transport Sector Reform Project, and he has continued in this capacity within the Ministry of Tourism and Transport.

Dr. Sá Nogueira's appointment is particularly significant for the broader African tourism landscape. One of the continent's major tourism challenges is air connectivity, and with his deep experience in aviation management and strategic investment, he is well-positioned to drive solutions that enhance accessibility. His leadership



is expected to prioritize initiatives that improve air transport efficiency, attract foreign investment, and promote sustainable tourism growth in Cape Verde and beyond.

## Lily Ajarova Appointed Senior Presidential Advisor on Tourism

The President of Uganda has appointed Lilly Ajarova as Senior Presidential Advisor on Tourism. Ms. Ajarova's appointment recognizes her strategic leadership and the extensive contribution, dedicated service towards advancing Uganda's tourism industry in the global tourism landscape.

In her new role as Senior Presidential Advisor on Tourism, Dr Ajarova will advise the President on strategic tourism policies and initiatives, while ensuring that the sector's growth is aligned to the national development agenda; promote Uganda's diversified tourism offerings; foster international collaborations that benefit the tourism sector.

During her tenure at UTB, Ms. Ajarova oversaw the development, launch and roll out of the Explore Uganda destination brand, improved quality assurance service delivery in tourism establishments across the country,

enhanced tourism product development including MICE tourism promotion, created partnerships with stakeholders and development partners.

Under her leadership, UTB was also recognized and given an Excellence Service Award, as the 3rd best performing government agency in 2022.

"This is an exciting new chapter in my journey. I look forward to working closely with all stakeholders to ensure that tourism remains a key driver of Uganda's economic development. This role presents an opportunity to further align Uganda's tourism sector with the government's target of tenfold economic growth. Tourism is a cornerstone of our

national economy, and I am committed to leveraging my experience to drive strategic initiatives that enhance Uganda's global competitiveness, attract investment, and create sustainable

opportunities for our people. I am deeply honored by the trust placed in me by

His Excellency the President," she said. Uganda Tourism Board offers its congratulations to Dr Ajarova on this remarkable

achievement and looks forward to her remarkable contribution in the new capacity as Senior Presidential Advisor on Tourism.



## Kenya Unveils Tourism Campaign to Woo Australian Travelers

Kenya is stepping up efforts to unlock the potential of the Australian travel market as part of a strategic push to boost international arrivals.

Speaking during a high-level engagement with tourism stakeholders and media in Melbourne, Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife, Hon. Rebecca Miano, underscored the immense growth opportunities in the Australian market and highlighted the longstanding historical ties between the two nations.

"Australia has always been a valued tourism partner for Kenya, and we are eager to re-engage with Australian travellers, making up for lost time during the Covid-19 pandemic. With our unparalleled wildlife, breathtaking beaches, and rich cultural heritage, Kenya is ready to deliver the unforgettable and authentic experiences that Australian travellers seek," CS Miano stated.

In 2024, Kenya welcomed 27,396 Australian visitors, a number the CS is optimistic will significantly increase as the country strengthens its tourism links with Australia.

As part of her visit to key Australian cities, CS Miano will hold discussions with leading tour operators, and interact with the Kenyan diaspora community. She reiterated the Ministry's commitment to showcasing Kenya's diverse tourism offerings, tapping into Australia's growing appetite for travel experiences that encompass culture, cuisine, wellness, wildlife, and adventure.

"We want to captivate the Australian market with the magic that is Kenya. Whether travelers seek adventure, relaxation, or meaningful cultural connections, Kenya has something special to offer. Our discussions with tour operators will focus on making travel to Kenya seamless and irresistible for Australians," she added.

The Kenyan diaspora remains a crucial pillar of the country's tourism agenda, and the CS's engagements in Australia align with the "Ziara Kenya: One Diaspora, One Tourist" campaign. This initiative seeks to rally the diaspora



The Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife (2nd from left) presenting souvenir to a participant at the roadshow

community to serve as ambassadors for Kenyan tourism, encouraging more Australians to visit.

Australia ranks 6th globally in international tourism expenditure, with Australians spending over USD 41.4 billion annually on outbound trips – a market Kenya is keen to tap into.

CS Miano also took the opportunity to commend the Kenya 7s rugby team for their recent participation in the Perth 7s tournament, noting the event's role in enhancing Kenya's visibility on the global stage and boosting the country's growing sports tourism sector.

"As we continue to market Kenya's diverse tourism offerings, sports tourism will remain a key focus. The electrifying reception and appeal of our Kenya 7s team at the Perth 7s showcased our country's sporting excellence while also serving as a powerful platform to drive interest in Kenya as a travel destination. Such impactful showcases by our sports ambassadors help place Kenya on the global map, inspiring tourism growth," she remarked.

**"We want to captivate the Australian market with the magic that is Kenya. Whether travelers seek adventure, relaxation, or meaningful cultural connections, Kenya has something special to offer. Our discussions with tour operators will focus on making travel to Kenya seamless and irresistible for Australians"**

With renewed focus and strategic partnerships, Kenya is positioning itself as a top destination for Australian travellers, promising a vibrant mix of adventure, heritage, and world-class hospitality.

## Mauritius Appoints New Leadership for Tourism Sector

The President of Mauritius has appointed Christian Harold Richard Duval as the new Minister of Tourism, with Sydney Pierre assuming the position of Junior Minister for Tourism. Together, they are expected to strengthen the progress made in the sector and develop strategies to further expand the industry.

Mauritius, a key player in Africa's tourism industry, continues to attract millions of visitors annually. With these new appointments, the government aims to enhance the country's position as a premier destination while ensuring sustainable tourism practices.

Christian Harold Richard Duval, now at the helm of the Ministry of Tourism, will focus on strengthening Mauritius' global appeal as a luxury and sustainable destination. His role involves promoting investment in the sector, improving infrastructure, and ensuring that Mauritius remains competitive in an evolving tourism landscape.

Supporting him in this mission is Sydney Pierre, the newly appointed Junior Minister for Tourism. Pierre will work alongside Duval in implementing key tourism strategies, engaging



Christian Harold Richard Duval, Minister of Tourism



Sydney Pierre, Junior Minister of Tourism

with stakeholders, and fostering collaborations that enhance visitor experiences.

With international arrivals to Africa recovering strongly post-pandemic, Mauritius is well-positioned to capitalize on this growth. The new leadership is expected to drive policies that not only attract high-value travelers but also ensure long-term sustainability in tourism. Industry stakeholders, including Coquille Bonheur, have expressed confidence in the new ministers, anticipating policies that will

drive innovation and strengthen the tourism sector.

The appointment of Christian Harold Richard Duval and Sydney Pierre signals a renewed commitment by the Mauritian government to reinforce the country's standing as a leading tourist destination. Their leadership will be instrumental in shaping the industry's future, ensuring economic growth, and enhancing Mauritius' reputation on the global stage.

## Malawi Tourism Minister Meets with UN Tourism Secretary General to Strengthen Cooperation

During this year's FITUR International Tourism Fair in Madrid, Malawi's Minister of Tourism, Vera Kamtukule, met with UN Tourism Secretary General Zurab Pololikashvili to discuss strengthening cooperation between Malawi and the UN Tourism Agency

"As a member of the global tourism body, it was essential that I meet with the SG to convey my heartfelt gratitude on the unwavering support his organization has provided to Malawi in its quest to grow tourism" Kamtukule said.

The Minister touted Malawi as a unique country with an unrivaled combination of tourism products. Adding that, "But without properly

curated communications and branding strategy, it will be hard to get the world to notice this gem. Therefore the partnership between UN Tourism and Malawi tourism in this regard is not only strategic but also lubricates our efforts to expose Malawi to the world"

On his part, the Secretary General, Pololikashvili said he was happy to receive the minister.

He lauded the Malawi Government for making tourism part of their ATM (Agriculture, Tourism and Mining) strategy.

Malawi, has maintained excellent relations with the organisation since they joined as one of the founding members in 1975.

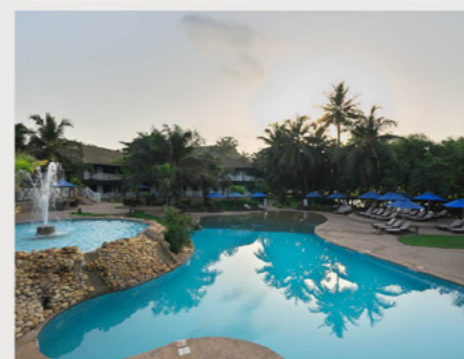


Vera Kamtukule, Malawi's Minister of Tourism, with UN Tourism Secretary General Zurab Pololikashvili



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## The Bench rebrands the Africa Hospitality Investment Forum (AHIF) as the Future Hospitality Summit Africa (FHS Africa)



The Bench a global leader in hospitality investment events, is rebranding the Africa Hospitality Investment Forum (AHIF) as Future Hospitality Summit Africa (FHS Africa). Doing so brings AHIF, Africa's most influential tourism investment conference, under The Bench's flagship Future Hospitality Summit, or 'FHS' brand, aligning it with FHS Saudi Arabia and the Dubai-based FHS World. This evolution is a response to a growing appetite for hospitality investment spreading across the whole Middle East and Africa (MEA) region.

For over a decade, AHIF has shaped Africa's hospitality industry, bringing together global investors, government leaders, and hotel developers to facilitate high-value deals and meaningful discussions, ranging from investment opportunities to government policy and infrastructure developments. The event has catalysed billions of dollars in investment, strengthened regional partnerships, and provided a dedicated space for investors to unlock opportunities in Africa's rapidly expanding hospitality sector.

The appetite for hospitality investment in Africa has never been stronger. The continent has a record-breaking pipeline of hotel developments, with over 300,000 new 'keys' projected by 2030. Cities like Nairobi, Casablanca, Cape Town, and Addis Ababa are leading this transformation, with Nairobi's Average Daily Rate (ADR) increasing by 164% and Casablanca's ADR rising by 141% compared to 2019.

Africa's post-pandemic recovery has outpaced global expectations, with demand exceeding 2019 levels for nine consecutive months. International arrivals are projected to grow by 6-7% annually, reinforcing Africa's position as an attractive destination for hospitality and tourism investment. At AHIF 2024, over \$365 million in deals were signed, further solidifying the event's role as a catalyst for investment across the region.

Set to take place from 17-19 June 2025 in Cape Town, FHS Africa will provide a highly curated environment where investors, developers, and industry leaders will engage in forward-looking

discussions tailored to the region's opportunities and challenges. Key themes for 2025 will include:

- **Financing Models:** Structuring investments to drive sustainable growth in Africa's evolving markets.
- **Sustainable Investment and ESG:** Making environmental and social governance a profitable venture rather than a cost.
- **Cross-Border Collaboration:** Exploring policies and infrastructure advancements that can boost intra-African trade and tourism.
- **Branded Residences and Mixed-Use Developments:** Understanding the rise of alternative asset classes in hospitality.
- **Technology and Innovation:** The role of AI, blockchain, and digital transformation in African hospitality.

While FHS Africa remains, the leading event dedicated to Africa's hospitality sector, its integration into the FHS ecosystem ensures that African stakeholders benefit from increased exposure at FHS World—the largest hospitality investment gathering in the region. This closer connection allows

*“This transformation marks a pivotal moment for The Bench and the African hospitality sector. With Africa's investment potential gaining global attention, FHS Africa will provide a focused, high-impact platform, while FHS World ensures that African markets are showcased on the biggest investment stage. The synergy between these events will accelerate deal-making, policy engagement, and long-term industry growth.”*

African markets to be positioned within a broader investment context, attracting more international capital, expertise, and strategic collaboration.

With its status as a global hub, Dubai serves as the operational headquarters for many international corporations, including The Bench, and plays a pivotal role in fostering investment into African markets. The city offers over 50 daily flights to major African destinations, enhancing accessibility for investors and business leaders alike. Dubai's position as a financial and innovation hub makes it an ideal launchpad for deeper engagement with Africa's growing tourism economy.

The FHS portfolio unites the hospitality sector's most influential meetings under one roof. By consolidating its flagship events, The Bench enhances the industry's ability to connect major stakeholders, drive investment, and foster cross-market collaboration. The presence of the world's leading hotel groups, investment firms, and policymakers at all FHS events underscores its role as the premier hospitality investment network in the region.

“This transformation marks a pivotal moment for The Bench and the African hospitality sector,” said Matthew Weihs, Managing Director of The Bench. “With Africa's investment potential gaining global attention, FHS Africa will provide a focused, high-impact platform, while FHS World ensures that African markets are showcased on the biggest investment stage. The synergy between these events will accelerate deal-making, policy engagement, and long-term industry growth.”

He concluded: “With the launch of FHS Africa in 2025, The Bench is reaffirming its commitment to shaping Africa's hospitality future through knowledge-sharing, investment facilitation, and strategic partnerships. As the industry continues to evolve, this rebranding ensures that stakeholders receive a more structured, globally integrated experience—designed to unlock Africa's full potential as the next major frontier for hospitality investment.”



## Angola Strengthens Strategic Tourism Partnerships on European Tour

The Angolan Ministry of Tourism, led by Minister Márcio de Jesus Lopes Daniel, recently concluded a five-day European tour aimed at exploring international partnerships and investment opportunities for the country's tourism sector. The delegation engaged with global industry stakeholders across Spain, the United Kingdom, and Germany, showcasing Angola's untapped tourism potential and advancing key development projects, including Cabo Ledo, Calandula, Mussulo, and the Angolan Okavango region.

The mission, which aligned with the FITUR International Tourism Fair in Madrid (January 21-26) and the 50th-anniversary celebration of the UN Tourism, underscored Angola's commitment to fostering sustainable tourism growth through strategic collaborations.

Angola's delegation presented the nation's tourism assets to global investors, focusing on:

- Cabo Ledo and Calandula Tourism Development Poles: Two areas identified for eco-tourism and high-end leisure investments.
- Angolan Okavango Region: A pristine,

biodiversity-rich area positioned as a premium eco-tourism destination.

- Mussulo Peninsula: A prime coastal destination targeted for upscale tourism and leisure development.

The tour featured targeted discussions with global hospitality giants, engineering firms, and destination management experts. Key engagements included:

Madrid, Spain: Meetings with major hospitality brands, including Meliá, RIU, NH Hotels, and Iberostar, explored opportunities for establishing world-class hospitality infrastructure in Angola.

London, UK: Discussions with DAR, a renowned project management and engineering firm, focused on Angola's National Tourism Development Plan and the Mussulo Peninsula Tourism Development Plan. Additionally, meetings with the UK's Tourism and Hospitality Confederation sought to promote Angola as a viable destination for UK travelers and investors.

Frankfurt, Germany: Collaboration with the Kleber Group, a tourism operator specializing in the DACH region (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland),



examined strategies for leveraging tourism trends, market data, and attracting tourists from these key growth markets for Angola over the next two years.

Tourism had been identified as a critical driver of Angola's economic diversification agenda. By presenting Angola's unique offerings to key players in the global tourism industry, the Ministry aimed to attract investment, strengthen destination marketing efforts, and position Angola as a leading African destination. The European tour reflected a deliberate approach to establishing Angola as a competitive player in international tourism markets, particularly among eco-tourism and luxury travel segments.

Minister Márcio Daniel emphasized the significance of these partnerships, stating:

“The potential of Angola's tourism sector is immense. Through collaborations with international partners, we aimed to unlock this potential, create sustainable growth, and position Angola as a premier destination in Africa.”



## African Adventure Specialists strengthens Latin American presence, sets sights on Southern Africa

African Adventure Specialists, a premium destination management company based in Nairobi, Kenya, has reaffirmed its commitment to expanding its presence in the Latin American market while strengthening its operations in Africa.

The company exhibited at this year's International Tourism Trade Fair (FITUR 2025) in Madrid, Spain, courting buyers and participants with their products and services while showcasing their latest strategies for driving tourism growth between Africa and Latin America.

Speaking to VoyagesAfric at the event, Andrew Kitema, Co-Managing Director of African Adventure Specialists, shared insights into their ongoing initiatives and future plans for both markets.

### Breaking new ground in Latin America

The company has been making steady inroads into the Spanish-speaking world, with a keen focus on Latin America. In a strategic move to deepen its market penetration, African Adventure Specialists launched a representation office in Paraguay last November. This office serves as a hub for their growing operations in the region.

"We have a lot of plans lined up for 2025 and beyond," said Kitema. "We are looking forward to bringing African tourism to the Latin American world through familiarization trips and by engaging agents who will visit Africa and sell the destination. Since 2022, we have been putting in significant efforts, and our numbers have grown from just 200 visitors in 2022 to about a thousand in 2024."

Kitema attributes the surge in interest to the company's dynamic market approach, which involves attending key travel shows across the continent. "Every month, we are moving from one country to another doing self-calls whenever have shows in Colombia, Argentina, Brazil and many other small shows in South American countries whenever they are happening. This has been our great moment and the rise in growth of numbers that we have been getting in South America."



Martin Tobiko Koipa and Andrew Kitema, Co Founders of African Adventure Specialists

### Expanding footprint in Africa

Beyond Latin America, African Adventure Specialists which has two more offices in Rwanda and Tanzania has ambitious plans to expand its reach within Africa. The company is setting its sights on Southern Africa, where demand for destinations within the region is rising.

"We have plans to expand into Southern Africa, especially to South Africa itself, to Zambia because we have quite a number of requests we are getting for Vic Falls, Zimbabwe and possibly, Botswana in the coming days."

### Bright prospects for African tourism in 2025

The African tourism sector is poised for remarkable growth, according to Kitema. Reflecting on FITUR's evolving landscape, he noted a significant increase in African exhibitors. "It is growing and it will continue to grow immensely. Based on my experience on the previous years where, I saw like here in FITUR, we could have a few operators coming from different countries in Africa, now we see that the trajectory is changing – a lot of countries are here, a lot of tour operators even from my own Kenya who are participating in the show can only mean more growth and people to Africa" he observed.

**“ We have a lot of plans lined up for 2025 and beyond. We are looking forward to bringing African tourism to the Latin American world through familiarization trips and by engaging agents who will visit Africa and sell the destination. Since 2022, we have been putting in significant efforts, and our numbers have grown from just 200 visitors in 2022 to about a thousand in 2024. ”**

Kitema also encouraged young people to explore career opportunities in the tourism sector. "It is an industry which is growing and it's huge, so, I will ask them to join us; we are there for them and let them ask about anything they need to know about tourism, mentorship programmes and we will be there to help," he assured.

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# Azalai Hotels Group gets €10m from IFC to support tourism in West Africa

To support the tourism sector and create jobs in West Africa, IFC announced a €10 million loan for Azalai Hotels Group, a leading hospitality group in West Africa.

IFC's financing will support Azalai Hotels Group's working capital needs and regional expansion plans, which include the recently opened Azalai Hotel Dakar in Senegal, the reconstruction of Azalai Hotel Ouagadougou, in Burkina Faso, and the refurbishment of the Grand Hôtel Bamako in Bamako, Mali. This will help offer superior hospitality services in West Africa where the supply of such service is limited.

The tourism sector, an important source of jobs and contribution to GDP, was strongly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. IFC's backing to Azalai Hotels Group will support high-quality formal direct and indirect job creation and increased local sourcing opportunities for SME suppliers in the target countries. IFC's investment is supported by the

IDA Private Sector Window Blended Finance Facility.

Makhtar Diop, IFC Managing Director, said, "IFC's continued partnership with Azalai Hotels Group underscores our commitment to supporting the tourism sector in West Africa, which is key for high-quality job creation and local economic development. This renewed collaboration also underscores our strong commitment to supporting homegrown regional champions."

Mossadeck Bally, Azalai Hotels Group Founder, and Chairman, said, "This funding represents much more than a financial support; it is a renewed Trust from a premier strategic financial institution with whom we have a dynamic, successful, and value-creating partnership that has been in existence for three decades. This funding will support our regional expansion, while stimulating job creations and supply chain development within the sector. Thanks to IFC, its Director General, Mr.

Makhtar Diop and all those who have contributed for this renewed trust."

In addition to its financing support, IFC will provide advisory services to help the company improve its standards in corporate governance.

Since 1994, IFC has maintained a long-term partnership with Azalai Hotels Group, supporting five of its projects across the region. In addition to financial support, IFC has also provided advisory services to the company, focusing on food safety and financial management, further strengthening the group's operational capabilities and sustainability.

Last fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, IFC committed about \$615 million in investments and mobilizations in Senegal, a record for IFC in the country. IFC's current portfolio in Senegal is supporting vaccine production, digital infrastructure, tourism, housing, renewable energy, manufacturing, and agricultural value chains.



# Ghana eliminates visa requirements for African passport holders

Ghana is set to usher in a new era of Pan-African unity and economic integration by granting visa-free entry to citizens of all African nations starting in early 2025. The landmark decision, approved by former President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo in December 2024, positions Ghana as a trailblazer in regional integration and underscores its commitment to facilitating the free movement of people across the continent.

With this move, Ghana becomes the fifth African country to offer visa-free access to all holders of African passports, joining Rwanda, Seychelles, The Gambia and Benin. Previously, Ghana allowed visa-free entry to citizens of 26 African countries and offered visas on arrival to travellers from 25 others. Only two African nations were subject to pre-arrival visa requirements.

In a statement accompanying the announcement, former President Akufo-Addo highlighted the broader vision behind the initiative. "This is about building stronger ties across Africa," he remarked. "Ghana's future is tied to a united continent." The policy, he noted, delivers on a pledge he made at the Africa Prosperity Dialogues a year prior, where he emphasised the importance of removing barriers to mobility and fostering greater cooperation among African states.

## Advancing economic integration

The new visa policy aligns seamlessly with the African Union's overarching goal of deeper economic integration under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), headquartered in Accra, Ghana. AfCFTA aims to create a single market for goods and services across Africa, enhancing trade and economic opportunities for its 55 member states.

Experts have long identified restrictive visa regimes as a significant obstacle to intra-African trade, tourism, and cultural exchange. The African Development Bank (AfDB) has highlighted that stringent visa policies in certain countries, such as Libya, Equatorial Guinea, and Sudan, undermine efforts to promote unity and collaboration on the continent. "Free movement is essential for economic growth and the realisation of a truly integrated Africa," the AfDB stated in a recent report. Ghana's decision is expected to serve as a model for other nations to follow, creating a ripple effect that benefits the entire continent.

## Boosting tourism and diaspora engagement

Ghana's proactive visa reforms also complement its ongoing "Beyond the Return" initiative, which seeks to deepen ties with the African diaspora while promoting tourism and investment. As part of this effort, a special Non-Pre-Approval Visa policy has been



implemented annually for the past four years, taking effect from 1 December to 15 January. This temporary measure is designed to simplify travel processes during the holiday season, encouraging an influx of tourists and fostering economic and cultural connections.

The visa-free entry policy is anticipated to bolster Ghana's reputation as a leading hub for African travel, trade, and tourism. Already ranked fifth in the 2023 Visa Openness Index, behind Rwanda, Seychelles, The Gambia and Benin, Ghana stands to further enhance its status as a welcoming destination for both Africans and the global community.

The African Development Bank has previously criticised the "paradox of unity," whereby some foreign nationals enjoy visa-free access to African countries, while many Africans face significant travel restrictions within their own continent. Ghana's progressive visa policy directly addresses this disparity, reaffirming its commitment to fostering unity and inclusivity within Africa.

# Madagascar National Tourism Office Renews Partnership with Radisson Hotel Group

The National Tourism Office of Madagascar (ONTM) has renewed its partnership with Radisson Hotels Madagascar, reinforcing their shared commitment to promoting the island as a prime tourist destination.

Building on previous collaborations, the renewed agreement for 2025 will focus on key initiatives such as educational tours, press trips, and engagements with international influencers: strategies that proved effective in 2024. A notable addition to this year's partnership is the introduction of a B2B event targeting

the Emirati market, marking a significant step in expanding Madagascar's reach to new audiences.

The ONTM and Radisson Hotel Group first joined forces in 2022 with a common goal: to enhance Madagascar's visibility on the global tourism stage. Since then, their collaboration has played a vital role in positioning the country as a must-visit destination.

This renewed partnership reflects ONTM's broader commitment to working with the private sector in driving tourism growth. The organisation



welcomes strategic collaborations that contribute to elevating Madagascar's profile and unlocking new opportunities for the sector.



## Zambia to Host Third Travel, Hospitality & Tourism Education Summit

Zambia is set to host the third edition of the Travel, Hospitality, and Tourism Education Summit, a key event dedicated to shaping the future of tourism education and workforce development in Africa. The summit, scheduled for April 7-9, 2025, will take place at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre in Lusaka. Organized by the Zambia Institute for Tourism & Hospitality Studies (ZITHS), this year's summit is themed "Understanding the Knowledge and Skills Gaps in Africa's Trade in Services Industry: Empowering Africa's Tourism Workforce in the AfCFTA Era."

The summit is designed to bring together educators, policymakers, and employers as equal partners in developing human capital for tourism and its subsectors. It builds on the foundational pillars of the Tourism Education Guidelines introduced by UN Tourism in 2022, which provide clear professional and educational pathways essential for building a sustainable tourism sector.

This initiative aligns with Zambia's broader efforts to transform its tourism industry and increase its contribution to the national GDP under the Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP).

Tourism is a significant economic driver, with strong linkages to various sectors, including hospitality, transport, and retail. The industry is highly labor-intensive, making it a crucial source of employment, particularly for women and young people. The summit will serve as a platform for identifying and addressing skills gaps in the tourism workforce, thereby enhancing service delivery and competitiveness in the region.

Since its inception in 2023, the Travel, Hospitality & Tourism Education Summit has played a pivotal role in advancing tourism education in Zambia. The previous summits facilitated discussions on skills development, industry trends, and policy direction. One of the notable achievements has been the integration of Travel & Tourism as a subject pathway in the Zambia Education Curriculum

Framework (ZECF 2023-2033). This milestone underscores the summit's influence in shaping the educational landscape to better align with industry needs.

The 2025 summit is expected to attract stakeholders from across the continent, including representatives from UN Tourism, academia, and industry practitioners. The collaboration between Zambia's Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Education underscores the government's commitment to advancing competency-based learning and fostering synergies between education and industry.

As Zambia prepares to host this important gathering, ZITHS extends an open invitation to sponsors, speakers, educators, and employers to participate in this transformative initiative. The summit presents a unique opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue, share best practices, and contribute to shaping the future of Africa's tourism workforce.



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## Namibia Tourism Board clamps down on unregistered Airbnb Operators

The Namibia Tourism Board (NTB) has issued a firm directive to all accommodation providers operating through platforms like Airbnb, warning that unregistered establishments must comply with the Namibia Tourism Board Act of 2000 or face legal consequences.

Under Section 20 of the Act, anyone offering paid overnight accommodation is required to register with the NTB before providing services. The board has made it clear that failing to do so is unlawful and punishable by law.

Deadline for Compliance Set for April 2025

In an official statement, the NTB has urged all individuals renting out

accommodation via Airbnb and similar platforms to ensure compliance by 30th April 2025.

“Hosting paying guests without registration is unlawful and punishable by law,” the NTB stated.

Failure to register by the deadline will result in legal action, including potential criminal proceedings against non-compliant operators.

Ensuring Fair Play in Namibia's Tourism Industry

The NTB's crackdown is part of a broader effort to regulate the accommodation sector, ensuring that all operators meet the same legal and quality standards.



By enforcing registration, the board aims to protect tourists, uphold service standards, and create a fair business environment for all accommodation providers.

## Tourism Seychelles Unveils 2025 events calendar and key development in the Industry

Tourism Seychelles has successfully concluded a strategic media briefing in Johannesburg, South Africa, where Principal Secretary Sherin Francis presented the destination's dynamic vision for 2025, highlighting significant developments set to enhance the archipelago's tourism offering.

The exclusive breakfast session, held at Proud Mary Modern Eatery + Wine Bar in Rosebank, brought together key South African media representatives for an insightful discussion on Seychelles' future developments and upcoming major events.

During the session, Mrs. Francis unveiled several landmark initiatives, including new luxury hotel developments, an extensive collection of boutique properties and small homegrown products, as well as the new Seychelles Tourism Grading Programme,

reinforcing Seychelles' commitment to maintaining its position as a premier holiday destination.

Among the key highlights of the presentation were discussions surrounding Seychelles' sporting calendar for the year ahead. Mrs. Francis provided details regarding the upcoming FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup, alongside signature events such as the Seychelles Sailing Challenge and the Seychelles Nature Trail, positioning the destination as a hub for world-class sporting events.

The Tourism Seychelles team also seized the opportunity to generate excitement for the upcoming 40th Festival Kreol in October 2025. Mrs. Francis mentioned that the country is committed to ensuring it remains one of the most iconic events on the Seychelles socio-cultural calendar every year, making sure to engage visitors and keep the festival top of mind.

“Our engagement with the South African media market is crucial as we continue to strengthen our presence in this key region,” said Mrs. Francis. “The exciting developments and events planned for 2025 will enhance our tourism offering while creating significant opportunities for cultural exchange and economic



growth in our islands.”

The briefing also showcased new cultural experiences designed to offer visitors authentic encounters with Seychellois heritage, responding to the growing demand for meaningful travel experiences.

This media engagement forms part of Tourism Seychelles' broader strategy to maintain strong relationships with key market partners and ensure consistent, high-quality communication about the destination's offerings and developments.

Tourism Seychelles anticipates that these initiatives will contribute significantly to the destination's appeal, particularly in the South African market, which remains a vital source of visitors for the islands.



## FITUR exceeds expectations with record-breaking attendance

The 45th International Tourism Fair, organized by IFEMA MADRID, closed its doors with outstanding participation and attendance figures. FITUR has exceeded expectations, reaching a first estimate of nearly 255,000 visitors, with significant growth in its first three days, which welcomed 155,000 professionals.

These figures reflect the strong recovery of the global tourism industry in 2024, with 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals, according to UNWTO, as well as record numbers for both Spain and Madrid, which saw 94 million and 16 million visitors, respectively. Furthermore, these FITUR figures anticipate the forecast that, in 2025, both travelers and tourism spending will continue to grow, driven by strong demand. Worldwide, tourism-related revenues have reached 1.9 trillion US dollars, with Spain and Madrid following this trend. Tourist spending figures have risen to 126 billion euros nationally and 16 billion euros in the Madrid region. Moreover, these figures from FITUR anticipate that by 2025 both traveler

numbers and tourism spending will continue to grow, driven by strong demand.

Alongside these outstanding attendance figures, and with a total of nine halls, FITUR 2025 consolidates its leadership in participation, hosting more than 9,500 companies across 884 stands. This year, FITUR has brought together 156 countries from around the world, with 101 of them participating with official delegations. This influx also has an economic impact of 445 million euros on Madrid.

Under the theme "Proud. We Are Tourism," FITUR has celebrated an edition in which all stakeholders have advocated for sustainability criteria to ensure balanced and viable global growth in the medium and long term for both the planet and local communities. Additionally, experts have emphasized how diversification, seasonality reduction, and the integration of new technological tools are driving an inclusive and competitive tourism model that ensures a more sustainable future

for all. This model is promoting different types of tourism that contribute to this development, including sports, film, and language tourism.

Progress toward this sustainable tourism model is also essential to preserve the right to travel for future generations, ensuring that travel remains an accessible and enriching reality.

With Brazil as the Partner Country, the Fair was inaugurated on January 22 by Their Majesties, the King and Queen of Spain. The event saw the participation of all stakeholders in the tourism industry's value chain, who presented the latest trends, showcased the sector's dynamism through numerous business transactions, and exchanged knowledge and best practices to continue shaping the sustainable development of the industry.

IFEMA MADRID is already working on the 2026 edition of FITUR, which will take place from January 21 to 25, with Mexico as the Partner Country.



## The Shifting Landscape of Africa's MICE Industry: A 2025 Outlook

The global meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) industry is entering a new phase, and Africa stands at the forefront of this transformation. With major events such as the G20 summit making their mark on the continent, industry stakeholders are rethinking strategies, embracing data-driven approaches, and reimagining their role in shaping economies.

"The momentum of 2024 has just continually pushed us down the river at an accelerated rate," Glenton De Kock, CEO of SAACI, a seasoned industry leader, reflects on the start of the year. While January is traditionally a slow period for business events, South Africa's recent hosting of the Mining Indaba and the early in-person meetings for the G20 suggest a different narrative. Activity levels are soaring, and destinations across the continent are witnessing a surge in demand for MICE infrastructure and services.

However, this rapid pace comes with its challenges. "Our industry has a tendency of not switching off completely," Glenton notes, emphasizing the need for better work-life balance even in a field that thrives on constant engagement. Yet, the opportunities ahead outweigh the challenges, signalling a defining year for Africa's MICE ecosystem.

The G20's presence in South Africa in 2025 is a game-changer. With a structured approach that ensures every region hosts at least one major event, the initiative is creating unparalleled opportunities for local suppliers, venues, and service providers. "Our role is ensuring that our members understand the deliverables and complexities of these events," Glenton explains. From PCOs (professional conference organizers) to AV companies and logistics teams, the industry is aligning itself to meet the global standards expected of such a high-profile gathering.

Beyond logistics, the G20 offers an opportunity to spotlight Africa as a premier business event destination. "It's not just about event delivery; it's about showcasing the destination itself," Glenton says. With governments and private sector players collaborating, Africa's positioning in the global MICE

landscape is being redefined.

As Africa continues its upward trajectory in the MICE sector, several key trends are emerging:

### 1. Data-Driven Decision Making

The importance of accurate and real-time data cannot be overstated. "We are developing Meet IQ, a centralized portal where live data and reporting can be accessed," Glenton reveals. This initiative aims to provide deeper insights into event impacts, supply chain dependencies, and economic contributions, allowing destinations to make informed decisions.

### 2. Professionalization and Accreditation

The industry is moving towards standardized accreditation for PCOs, ensuring a higher level of expertise and consistency in service delivery. "Entry into the industry needs structure. While accessible, there must be a framework that professionals adhere to," Glenton emphasizes. This shift towards professional recognition will elevate Africa's competitiveness on the global stage.

### 3. Sustainability as a Standard

Sustainability is no longer optional—it is a core principle guiding event planning. Legacy projects are becoming an integral part of MICE events, ensuring that host communities benefit long after a conference concludes. "Associations are embedding long-term impact strategies into their events," Glenton observes, marking a shift from short-term engagements to enduring contributions.

### 4. Increased Collaboration Between Sectors

As major industries such as mining, finance, and pharmaceuticals host large-scale events, their interactions with MICE professionals are fostering knowledge exchange and innovation. "The crossover between corporate clients and our members has been remarkable," Glenton notes, emphasizing how these collaborations will drive future growth.



Glenton De Kock, CEO of SAACI

### 5. Regional Expansion and Infrastructure Growth

Destinations across Africa are investing heavily in MICE infrastructure. With travel accessibility improving and new conference venues emerging, smaller cities are positioning themselves as viable alternatives to traditional hubs. "We're seeing destinations stepping up, offering world-class facilities and services," Glenton highlights, pointing to a broader continental shift.

Africa's MICE sector is experiencing an evolution driven by data, collaboration, and sustainability. The foundation laid in 2024 is propelling the industry into a high-energy, opportunity-rich 2025. With the G20 as a catalyst and a concerted focus on professionalization, the continent is poised to assert itself as a formidable player in the global business events arena.

The industry's ability to adapt, innovate, and maximize its strengths will determine its long-term success. As Glenton De Kock aptly puts it, "The work happening now is not just about the events of today—it's about shaping the industry of tomorrow."

# From Roadshows to Global Impact: The Africa Showcase Success Story

For nearly two decades, Africa Showcase has been at the forefront of transforming how African tourism suppliers engage with the world. Founded by Jacqui Reynolds and Amanda Margison under On Show Solutions, this strategic platform has redefined business networking in global tourism, bridging African destinations with international buyers through targeted roadshows and curated market engagements.

The story of Africa Showcase began with a simple yet powerful idea: to create a direct and impactful way for African tourism businesses to connect with international agents. What started as a modest roadshow in Ireland has since expanded into a formidable global presence, spanning multiple continents—from Europe and North America to Latin America, the Nordic region, and beyond. Each event is meticulously designed to foster meaningful business relationships, with a focus on quality over quantity. Typically, 15-20 carefully selected African exhibitors engage with pre-qualified buyers, ensuring that every interaction translates into real opportunities.

Africa Showcase's success lies in its precision-driven approach. "The match-up is critical, and we spend a lot of time on strategic support to really help the exhibitors understand what markets are right for them," Amanda Margison emphasizes. The team dedicates extensive research to understanding market trends, buyer dynamics, and evolving industry demands. "If we

“ *One of the big successes of Africa Showcase is the fact that we have our experts everywhere. This expansive network ensures that exhibitors and buyers receive invaluable local insights, making each event a strategic game-changer.* ”



Amanda Margison moderating one of the sessions



Jacqui Reynolds speaking at one of the roadshows

don't believe a particular product will deliver value in a specific market, we guide exhibitors toward more suitable destinations," adds Jacqui Reynolds. This strategic insight has led to notable achievements, including expansion into 12 international markets annually and first-time entries into emerging destinations such as Bucharest and Santiago.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for the

tourism industry, yet Africa Showcase emerged as a critical player in recovery efforts. By facilitating direct interactions between African suppliers and international agents, the platform played a pivotal role in rebuilding networks disrupted during the global shutdown. The impact was particularly significant in emerging markets like Latin America and Central Eastern Europe, where businesses experienced swift and direct returns from these engagements. "One of the big successes of Africa Showcase

is the fact that we have our experts everywhere," notes Amanda Margison. This expansive network ensures that exhibitors and buyers receive invaluable local insights, making each event a strategic game-changer. Reflecting on the journey, she adds, "You are not going to work a day in your life if you enjoy what you do. Enjoy what you do, and that's it."

As part of its commitment to innovation, the platform introduced Essence of Africa in 2024. Hosted in Nairobi, this exclusive event reimagines traditional networking by focusing on highly curated one-on-one business meetings, offering a fresh model for African tourism professionals to foster partnerships with international buyers.

With nearly 20 years of impact, Africa Showcase continues to evolve. The next frontier? The Middle East. As Reynolds and Margison set their sights on further expansion, their mission remains steadfast: positioning Africa as a premier global destination. By staying ahead of market shifts, adapting to industry needs, and fostering genuine business connections, Africa Showcase has grown beyond an event series—it has become a dynamic ecosystem driving African tourism's global ascent.

As the platform nears its milestone anniversary, its legacy stands as a testament to strategic entrepreneurship, resilience, and an unwavering passion for showcasing the extraordinary potential of Africa to the world.



# Tourism Seychelles Concludes Successful Showcase at FITUR 2025

Tourism Seychelles successfully concluded its participation in the 45th edition of the International Tourism Trade Fair, known as FITUR, held from January 22 to 26, 2025, at IFEMA in Madrid, Spain.

This five-day event offered Seychelles an excellent opportunity to promote the destination within the Iberian region, reaffirming its status as a premier island destination and strengthening its global tourism network.

The Seychelles delegation was led by Mrs. Bernadette Willemin, Director General for Destination Marketing, and Mrs. Monica Gonzalez, Senior Marketing Executive based in Madrid. They were accompanied by key co-exhibitors – three of Seychelles' leading Destination Management Companies (DMCs) – namely Mr. Andre Butler-Payette from 7° South, Ms. Amy Michel from Mason's Travel, and Mrs. Normandy Salabao from Creole Travel Services. Together, the delegation showcased the country's unique cultural heritage, pristine natural landscapes, and sustainable tourism offerings.

Throughout the event, the Seychelles pavilion garnered significant attention from visitors, travel professionals, and media representatives. Attendees engaged in meaningful discussions about Seychelles' diverse travel experiences, from its iconic beaches and lush ecosystems to its eco-friendly initiatives. The pavilion embodied the essence of Seychelles as a sustainable and enchanting destination.

Mrs. Willemin emphasised the importance of diversifying Seychelles' visitor base and maintaining a strong presence in key markets such as Europe. She stated, "FITUR provides an invaluable platform for us to connect with our European partners, particularly in Spain, where we see great potential for growth. Diversifying our source markets and attracting visitors from different regions is vital for the sustainability of our tourism industry. By broadening our

reach, we can ensure Seychelles remains resilient and competitive in an ever-changing global landscape."

She also highlighted the crucial role played by Seychelles' DMCs in engaging potential buyers and showcasing tailored travel experiences. "Having DMCs participate in promotional activities, especially at fairs, is always a fantastic opportunity because they drive the conversation around our call-to-action. I am proud to highlight the seamless collaboration within the country's tourism sector, which ensured a thorough representation of Seychelles' hospitality and travel services, further enhancing its appeal to international stakeholders."

During FITUR 2025, Mrs. Willemin also shared the Seychelles experience on a live radio programme, reaching a broad audience. She emphasised Seychelles' unique attractions as a must-visit destination and outlined the country's commitment to sustainability and diversification in the tourism sector. Her participation enhanced Seychelles' visibility and engagement with the European market.

Europe remains a crucial market for Seychelles tourism, and FITUR 2025



Mrs. Bernadette Willemin,  
Director General for Destination Marketing

reaffirmed the country's position as a preferred destination for European travellers. The delegation engaged with Spanish tour operators, travel agents, and key stakeholders, paving the way for fruitful collaborations and exciting new travel opportunities. The event also allowed Tourism Seychelles to introduce tailored offerings designed to meet the preferences of Spanish travellers seeking unique and unforgettable experiences.

On behalf of Tourism Seychelles, Mrs. Willemin extended her heartfelt gratitude to its co-exhibitors and everyone who contributed to the success of FITUR 2025. As the delegation returns to Seychelles, the focus remains on nurturing the connections established at the event and driving the growth of sustainable tourism in the archipelago.

## ICCA CEO Senthil Gopinath Appointed Chair of Events Industry Council (EIC)

The Events Industry Council (EIC), the global voice of the business events industry on advocacy, research, professional recognition and standards, announced the election of officers and directors to its 2025 Board of Directors.

In 2024, the EIC Council approved an expansion and restructuring of the Board to ensure ongoing continuity and representation. The expanded Board will have four directors, including the new position of Treasurer who automatically advances to Chair-Elect. In addition to seven at-large association seats on the board, the slate will now include two at-large representatives from EIC's corporate membership.

Senthil Gopinath, CEO of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) transitions to Chair of EIC, having held the role of Chair-Elect in 2024. With more than 20 years' experience in the global meetings, association and leisure industry, Gopinath is known for leadership, passion and commitment to the business events and meetings industry.

Stephanie Harris, President of the



Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) was elected Chair-Elect, and Jason Dunn, CEO of the National Coalition of Black Meeting Professionals, was elected Treasurer. Harris will serve as Chair in 2026, followed by Dunn in 2027. Ana María Viscasillas, MBA, CDME, Board Liaison for COCAL, will serve as Past-Chair on the 2025 Board.

"I am deeply honoured to lead EIC's

Board of Directors during this exciting and pivotal time for the business events industry," Gopinath said. "I am grateful for the steadfast leadership of past Chairs Ana María Viscasillas and Sherrif Karamat, and am thankful for their ongoing support as we continue our work to advance our industry across all sectors for the benefit of all members and partners."

## MPI to Spotlight Africa at Global Meetings Industry Day 2025

On April 3, 2025, the Global Meetings Industry Day (GMID) will be commemorated with a strong focus on the industry's global footprint. This year, Meeting Professionals International (MPI) will spotlight the Africa marking a significant milestone in integration into the global meetings and events industry.

As the world prepares to mark the ninth edition of GMID, MPI—the largest global association for meeting and event professionals—will introduce a unique approach to the annual event. Established in 1972, MPI is dedicated to fostering professional growth through education, networking, and business exchange opportunities. With a global community of 60,000 professionals across more than 90 chapters and clubs in 19 countries, MPI has played a crucial role in elevating the meetings and events industry worldwide. However, Africa currently lacks an official MPI chapter or

club, a gap that this year's GMID seeks to address.

GMID, launched in 2016, serves as an international advocacy day highlighting the impact of business meetings, trade shows, incentive travel, exhibitions, conferences, and conventions. It brings together industry professionals to discuss trends, challenges, and opportunities that shape the sector. The 2025 edition will focus on Africa's potential, exploring ways to integrate the continent more effectively into the global meetings industry.

For African professionals in meetings and events, this presents an opportunity to engage with global leaders, exchange knowledge, and establish networks that could drive sectoral growth. The continent's expanding infrastructure, increasing interest in business tourism, and growing recognition of its unique destinations make it an emerging force

in the industry.

By participating in GMID 2025, African destinations, venues, and professionals can leverage this platform to highlight their contributions to the industry, attract investment, and enhance collaboration with global stakeholders. The event is expected to serve as a catalyst for advancing Africa's position within the international meetings and events landscape.

As MPI brings Africa into the spotlight, the 2025 GMID offers an opportunity for professionals, businesses, and policymakers to shape the future of the industry on the continent. The discussions and engagements during this year's event will lay the groundwork for stronger partnerships, increased recognition, and sustainable growth within Africa's tourism and meetings sector.

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## Time for action: IMEX launches 2025 Talking Point

Ahead of IMEX Frankfurt in May, the IMEX Group has announced the next evolution of its Talking Point with the topic for 2025: Impact 2.0 – Activating the Future. The company's annual Talking Point forms a focus for the year ahead, anchoring IMEX show content, research and storytelling as well as providing a theme for exhibitors, partners and attendees to explore at each IMEX show and throughout the year.

The 2025 Talking Point is a continuation of the Impact topic launched last year, but developed to address the current global climate and with a firm focus on taking positive action and using events to make real, lasting change happen.

### 'There's no impact without action'

Carina Bauer, CEO of the IMEX Group, explains: "When we introduced Impact as our 2024 Talking Point, we wanted to spark change—to get the industry thinking more deeply about why we do what we do. But we quickly realized one year wasn't enough. The world has only become more disconnected, and the role of face-to-face events has never been more critical.

"We're now seeing a global shift. People are craving more social connection and longing for that special shared energy that you can only experience in person. So, we're evolving the conversation with Impact 2.0 – Activating the Future. It's about going beyond inspiration and turning values into action. Because let's face it—there's no impact without action."

### Three Talking Point pillars

The Talking Point is designed to help event professionals harness the power of carefully-designed events and experiences in the years ahead and make changes, however small, to deliver positive change.

The focus is on three key, and hugely current, areas where events have the potential to deliver the most impact:

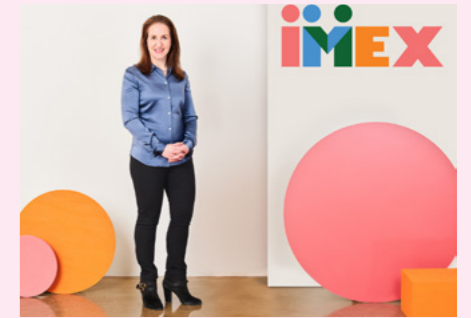
**i. The Next Gen :** According to Forrester research, 74 per cent of the workforce is projected to comprise Millennials and Generation Z by 2030. We'll explore how to make the events industry irresistible to this talent pool.

**ii. Social Disconnection and Loneliness:** In 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the Commission on Social Connection, calling loneliness 'a pressing health threat.' IMEX will be asking how event and intentional experiential design can answer this rapidly growing need for belonging, friendship ('frolleagues') and restorative connections.

**iii. De-risking the Future:** We're now only five years away from the 2030 target set out in the Paris Climate Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. How do we make the carbon cost of attending events more worthwhile and demonstrate a credible return on carbon investment?

### Impact 2.0 at IMEX Frankfurt

IMEX Frankfurt, taking place 20-22 May,



will share many ways for planners to explore these three areas. As well as new show floor activations and research data, a dedicated Impact education track brings together an impressive global roster of speakers sharing their stories of change and activation.

The Talking Point is also woven into the IMEX-EIC Innovation in Sustainability Award with added Impact 'bonus points' awarded to entries which show exceptional success in this area. Applications are now open for the award\* which has been designed to celebrate meeting, incentive and exhibition professionals driving sustainability through innovation and collaboration.

Carina sums up: "Positive action sits at the core of our Talking Point – we invite the industry to join us and effect real and lasting change. It's about accepting the influence at our fingertips and using it wisely to create events which embrace the next gen, nourish connections and support our planet. Even small changes can create a ripple effect, delivering a collective and positive impact."

IMEX Frankfurt takes place 20-22 May, with registration going live soon. More details

## Airbus signs Flight Hour Services contract for Ethiopian Airlines' A350 fleet

Airbus has signed a 7-year Flight Hour Services (FHS) contract with Ethiopian Airlines for the comprehensive maintenance of its fleet of 24 Airbus A350 aircraft, including both the A350-900 and A350-1000 models. This agreement will provide Ethiopian Airlines with dedicated on-site stock in Addis-Abeba, access to Airbus material pools worldwide, as well as repair and engineering support for a wide range of critical rotatable parts.

By leveraging Airbus' extensive engineering expertise, Ethiopian Airlines will benefit from guaranteed component availability, rapid access to essential parts, and optimised maintenance processes. This will ensure minimal aircraft downtime and maximise operational reliability across its global network.

Retta Melaku, Chief Operating Officer of Ethiopian Airlines, said: "As the first African operator of the A350 Family, we are committed to maintaining the highest

standards of performance and reliability across our fleet. Partnering long-term with Airbus through this FHS agreement will help us optimise operations, reduce maintenance-related delays, and ensure our passengers continue to experience the best in safety, comfort, and service."

Laurent Negre, Vice President of Customer Services for Airbus Africa and Middle East, said: "This partnership reinforces Airbus' commitment to delivering tailor-made maintenance solutions that support airlines in achieving the highest levels of operational efficiency. We are proud to support Ethiopian Airlines with our Flight Hour Services solution to enhance fleet reliability and streamline maintenance operations for its A350s."

Ethiopian Airlines has been a long-standing Airbus partner and was the first African carrier to operate both A350-900, in June 2016 and A350-1000, which entered service in November 2024.



Airbus Flight Hour Services (FHS) provides a comprehensive maintenance solution designed to help airlines ensure component reliability and availability while controlling maintenance costs. Through a combination of pooled inventory, on-site stock, and tailored repair and engineering support, FHS helps carriers optimise operations and improve fleet reliability. More than 1,400 aircraft worldwide are currently covered by Airbus FHS agreements.





## Zambia Strengthens Its MICE Tourism Ambitions with Strategic Report Launch

With the release of the "Harnessing Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) for Zambia's Tourism Sector Growth" report, Zambia is making a significant move to position itself as a top business travel destination. The research, which was released by the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) and the Zambia Institute for Policy Analysis and Research (ZIPAR), provides a road map for maximising the nation's MICE potential and fostering economic expansion.

The event, graced by Hon. Rodney Malindi Sikumba, Minister of Tourism, brought together key policymakers, industry stakeholders, and private-sector leaders to explore how Zambia can capture a greater share of the global MICE market, projected to reach \$1.44 trillion by 2025.

### Zambia's Growing MICE Market

The report highlights the significant revenue potential of Zambia's MICE sector, with business tourism earnings rising 67.49% from K178.24 million in 2021 to K298.55 million in 2023. This upward trend signals the industry's ability to drive job creation, infrastructure development, and economic diversification.

### Key Recommendations for Strengthening Zambia's MICE Sector

To fully capitalise on its MICE potential, the report provides strategic recommendations to enhance competitiveness and economic impact. These include:

1. Developing and Implementing a National MICE Tourism Strategy: A clearly defined national strategy will guide Zambia's MICE sector, setting targets, objectives, and action plans. International best practices suggest this should be completed within a year.
2. Increasing Funding for the Zambia Tourism Agency's (ZTA) MICE Unit: By bolstering financial and investment support, ZTA's MICE section will be able to promote initiatives, broaden its reach, and establish the groundwork for a national convention bureau.
3. Establishing a National Convention Bureau: A dedicated body to coordinate, manage, and promote MICE tourism is crucial for attracting high-profile events and streamlining industry operations.
4. Developing an International Convention Centre in Livingstone: Leveraging Livingstone's global tourism appeal, a world-class convention centre could cement

Zambia's status as a preferred MICE destination. Addressing delays surrounding the Shungu Namutitima International Convention Centre is a key step.

5. Streamlining Licensing for MICE Operators: A single licensing initiative will cut costs and administrative burdens, making Zambia a more business-friendly destination for event organisers.
6. Enhancing MICE Data Management: By integrating digital data systems from the Immigration Authority, ZamStats, and the Ministry of Tourism, precise statistics on MICE visitors will be available to support investment planning and decision-making.

### Building Zambia's Future as a MICE Leader

With the right policy framework, investment, and marketing strategies, Zambia has the potential to become a sought-after destination for global events. The report lays the groundwork for a thriving MICE industry, which could drive broader economic benefits across multiple sectors.

The message is clear: Zambia is ready to welcome the world of business tourism.

Find out more details about the report here: <https://lnkd.in/dj8Sqcm>



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# DISCOVER NAMIBIA

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## Duct Tape and Visa Wins: Africa's Aviation Survival Guide for 2025



It is time to cut through the noise. African aviation's 2024 report card reads like a gifted student with a chronic habit of forgetting to do their homework. The potential remains, but the results often fail to live up to expectations. Sure, the continent's share of global air traffic in 2024 inched up from 2.1% to 2.2% according to IATA, a microscopic gain if we want to be generous, but let's not get ahead of ourselves with the congratulations. The real positive news comes from looking deeper into the numbers, as Africa recorded a 13.4% growth in absolute traffic numbers. Nonetheless, load factors remain stuck at a dismal 74% while the rest of the world cruises at 80% and more. Africa still loves the theatre of a half-empty widebody painted with the national flag rumbling down the runway, and success is often benchmarked by how much money can be squandered on acquiring the latest toys rather than on learning how to use them profitably.

Africa's aviation infrastructure remains held together by duct tape, prayers, and the occasional fallout from outrage after a particularly egregious situation. Let's consider South Africa, the continent's largest and supposedly most advanced aviation market as an example. In a salute to the fuel queues that African motorists often must endure to top up their tanks, the busiest airport in Africa, Johannesburg's OR Tambo, has recently been afflicted with Jet A-1 shortages yet again, something that Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) assure us annually that they have addressed, until next year's crisis comes along. Baggage system failures are so common that the "backup" manual sortation system runs almost in parallel to the standard process. Air Traffic Navigation Services (ATNS), the agency charged

with Air Traffic Control services, has failed to recertify instrument approach procedures at multiple airports, resulting in the need to delay and divert flights in poor weather conditions despite expensive equipment being installed. Even the poor South African Weather Service (SAWS) has had their forecasting system hacked, resulting in the need for pilots to check weather reports on social media pages rather than through official channels prior to each departure. Yet, the industry plods onward. These aren't glitches, but rather systemic failures. We have lowered our standards so far that mediocrity begins to be seen in a positive light.

The rest of Africa is not immune to these infrastructural challenges either. For every planned multi-billion-dollar mega project like the one in Ethiopia, there are stalled plans all over the continent. Kenya's proposed partnership with India's Adani Airports to redevelop Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi was terminated after much controversy and allegations of impropriety on both sides of the deal. Malawi has revived plans to actually begin construction on Orton Chirwa International Airport in the northern city of Mzuzu, a project whose groundbreaking took place nearly a decade ago. It took the crash of a military aircraft carrying the Vice President of the country that was destined for the current unfit-for-purpose airstrip there to galvanize that project back into action. We cannot allow blood to be the financing instrument for improvements to aviation infrastructure anymore. African aviation safety has crossed that Rubicon a while ago.

Access to capital, both financial and human, remains a challenge for African aviation. An obvious solution seems to be cross-border investment and partnerships, and several high-profile and low-profile projects over the past year have highlighted this. Qatar Airways' 25% investment in South Africa's Airlink drew the most attention, but their quiet support of their other proposed investment in Rwandair is actually having the larger impact. With a handful of managers from Doha on secondment now in Kigali, that perpetual sponge of taxpayer funds is finally beginning to prioritise commercially focused decisions over national pride. On a much smaller scale, the launch

“*Africa's aviation infrastructure remains held together by duct tape, prayers, and the occasional fallout from outrage after a particularly egregious situation.*”

of Air Sierra Leone, a hitherto tiny operation funded by the private sector in partnership with XEJet of Nigeria, shows that cooperation doesn't have to be at intergovernmental level. Yet despite these positives, the imbroglio in South Africa over flySafair's ownership structure remains a warning that the regulatory environment in many African countries doesn't always welcome globalisation. Archaic and pernicky regulations on ownership and control are remnants of a past age rather than enlightened policymaking with an eye to the future.

Finally, visa regulations have slowly but steadily made progress in the background. After less than a year, Kenya has rolled back their controversial changes to require most Africans to obtain a "not-a-visa" paid Electronic Travel Authorisation to visit the country. Ghana, which continues to promise an eVisa system "coming soon" nearly two decades after first proposing it, has gone one step further and waived visas for all African Union member state visitors. Even South Africa, a constant whipping boy for its previously dysfunctional visa systems, has reformed thoroughly under new ministerial direction, with the Department of Home Affairs clearing a huge visa backlog and processing new tourist eVisa applications in a matter of weeks. Baby steps, but positive ones nonetheless.

African aviation isn't perfect but it's alive. Like a minibus driver dodging the potholes on most African roads, it finds a way to keep moving forward despite the obstacles. I expect to see this resilience continue to shine through in 2025. Happy travels!

*Sean Mendis has two decades of experience in senior management roles within the aviation sector in Africa. He is presently based in Malawi, where he offers executive level consulting and intelligence to aviation stakeholders.*



# AFRICA COASTAL MARINE & MARITIME TOURISM TRADE MARKET

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## Exploring the World of Travel & Tourism: From Thrilling Wilderness Safaris to Navigating Digital and Data Privacy Compliance

The arrival of a tour group from Europe brings hope to a rural community which thrives on tourism, showcasing its cultural heritage. A party of 50 marking an important life milestone with lunchtime celebrations makes light work for the chefs in the kitchen. The engaging tour guide refreshes his knowledge for an international safari group hoping to capture the elusive leopards on the morning tours. All across the continent tourism stakeholders, whether restaurateurs' or cafes owners, tour operators or travel agencies, hoteliers or transportation providers aim to provide a unique experience for their clientele.

As we continue to embrace the digital age, familiarity with the provisions of digital laws to ensure compliance must be implemented across all stakeholders. Understandably when conceptualizing a tourism enterprise, the last component for most establishments is information technology, data protection and digital laws. The laws applicable to data protection are continuously evolving, and the speed of this evolution would place any small or medium enterprise into a tailspin.

The responsibilities of ensuring compliance rests on the establishments and it is crucially important that the protection in data and storage of information is appropriately handled.

The ramifications on failures to respect the integrity of online transactions, digital marketing, data protection and handling of private and personal information, could have dire consequences for any enterprise. No matter the jurisdiction of the company, it is increasingly necessary to ensure that the fundamentals of data protection are adhered to.

Tourism businesses operating with portals for online bookings and virtual experiences must invest in robust cybersecurity measures to prevent data breaches. Accordingly, the gold standard globally; the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) sets out fundamental principles for compliance - fairness, lawfulness, & transparent

processing. All enterprises must ensure that documentation is completed with legitimate interest and appropriate consents. Notification on data collection, and incorporation of notices in respect of privacy.

**Purpose Limitation:** Business must ensure that they limit the collection of personal data, minimizing the collected information, and appropriate destruction of data where no longer required.

**Data accuracy, confidentiality, integrity and minimization:** Where the businesses require collection of personal data, the company has a duty to ensure accuracy in respect thereof, as well as to maintain secure systems providing adequate confidentiality of the information collected, and security in retention of the information collated.

**Data protection officer:** Appointment of a data protection officer to ensure appropriate organizational measures and securing of personal data and record keeping, and processes according to the standards implemented by the GDPR.

**Data breaching processing & reporting:** Implementation of appropriate protocols and administrative processes, where data held is disclosed accidentally, or unlawful authorized, notification (within 72 hours) to the relevant authorities.

The route to gaining valuable insights and implementation of the correct tools, begins with understanding where the business is positioned, the amount of data collected from clients. Familiarization with international regulations, will place the company at an advantage when transacting with international customers, this will be true for entities operating in the tourism space.

Where in-country and jurisdictional laws have not yet been fully developed, adherence

to minimum standards, compliance with GDPR at a bare minimum will be necessitated. Failures for compliance may result in penalties for data breaches including sanctions, suspensions of activities, fines of up to 10 million Euros or 2% of the company's global annual turnover.

As countries align Data Protections Regulations, the Companies and enterprises must ensure that they are aware of their local legislation, the jurisdiction of which their customers emanate from and the requirements to protect the client's data. They must ensure that adequate measures are implemented and correct protocols developed to maintain compliance.

**By Safiyya Akoojee B.A, LLB, LLM  
Director Fortunatus Advisory LLC.  
United Arab Emirates Director  
Thomson Wilks Inc. South Africa**



## Air Seychelles achieves ISAGO and IOSA certification

Air Seychelles, the national airline of the Seychelles, has announced the successful attainment of the IATA Safety Audit for Ground Operations (ISAGO) and the IATA Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) certifications. Accredited by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) in January 2025, these endorsements mark a significant milestone in the airline's ongoing commitment to safety and operational excellence.



The ISAGO certification, a first for Air Seychelles, was achieved following a rigorous process that began in June 2023 with a thorough analysis by an external IATA-trained consultant. This was complemented by on-site training for key personnel in April 2024 and culminated in August 2024 with an exhaustive week-long audit conducted by IATA-trained ISAGO auditors. The evaluation encompassed critical areas such as passenger and baggage handling, aircraft ground movement, and cargo operations, ensuring adherence to industry standards.

ISAGO is an internationally recognized program designed for the oversight of ground handling service providers (GHSPs), which emphasizes the

implementation of standardized operational procedures. By achieving this certification, Air Seychelles demonstrates its dedication to enhancing performance, reducing risks and aligning with industry best practices.

In addition, Air Seychelles has also successfully completed the IOSA renewal accreditation process, an evaluation designed to assess the operational management and control systems of airlines. With this certification, the national airline adheres to more than 900 international safety standards, underscoring the importance given to global aviation safety.

"With the ISAGO and IOSA certifications, we are reaffirming our dedication to maintaining the highest standards in

ground operations and ensuring the safety and satisfaction of our airline partners and their passengers, as well as our own. This will bolster confidence among airlines serving the Seychelles and strengthen our standing as the ground handling agent. The achievements are also a testament to the hard work and dedication of our team, without which it would not have been possible," says Air Seychelles' CEO, Sandy Benoiton

Air Seychelles has been a member of IATA since 2006, with the ISAGO registration valid until August 2026 and the IOSA accreditation until January 2027. Following these periods, renewal audits will be conducted to ensure continuous improvement and adherence to safety standards.

## Claire Le Lay takes charge of Mauritian Tourism Promotion Authority with a bold vision



Claire Le Lay has been appointed as the new president of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA). A seasoned communications expert with a distinguished career in luxury and tourism, Le Lay steps into this pivotal role at a time when the island nation faces mounting competition from regional heavyweights like the Maldives and Thailand.

With a clear mandate from Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam and Minister of Tourism Richard Duval, Le Lay aims to redefine Mauritius's global tourism strategy. "Our destination must reinvent itself," she asserts, signalling a

transformative approach focused on authenticity and ecotourism. As sustainable travel increasingly influences global tourism trends, Le Lay's vision aligns Mauritius with the shifting preferences of high-value travellers.

To achieve this repositioning, the MTPA will prioritise targeted promotions, leveraging strategic partnerships with influential personalities under meticulously structured contracts. "Quality will prevail over quantity," Le Lay insists, reinforcing her ambition to elevate Mauritius as a premier destination for discerning travellers.

## The Congo Rumba Festival: Positioning Music as a Pillar of Tourism Promotion

In a strategic move to integrate music into its broader tourism development agenda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is set to host the maiden Congo Rumba Festival from July 16-19, 2025. The initiative aims to leverage the global appeal of Congolese rumba to position the country as a prime cultural tourism destination.

Speaking to *VoyagesAfriq* on the sidelines of the 45th FITUR International Tourism Expo in Madrid, Spain, DRC's Minister of Tourism, Didier Mpambia, underscored the festival's significance in marketing the country's tourism assets. The festival is designed to showcase the cultural depth of Congolese music while fostering regional and international collaborations within the tourism sector.

"We are using music as a key driver to elevate the visibility of DRC's tourism industry," Minister Mpambia stated. "Rumba is more than entertainment; it is a cultural force with the potential to attract visitors and investors while reinforcing our country's identity on the global stage."

The festival will incorporate sessions and masterclasses aimed at illustrating the role of music in tourism promotion. These sessions will provide stakeholders with insights into how the creative industry can support tourism growth and destination branding. Minister Mpambia emphasized that such discussions are critical in shaping effective tourism marketing strategies that extend beyond traditional promotional campaigns.

Twelve countries have confirmed their participation in the event, reflecting strong regional and international interest in the initiative. The presence of industry experts, artists, and tourism professionals is expected to create an exchange of ideas that could enhance tourism marketing efforts across Africa.

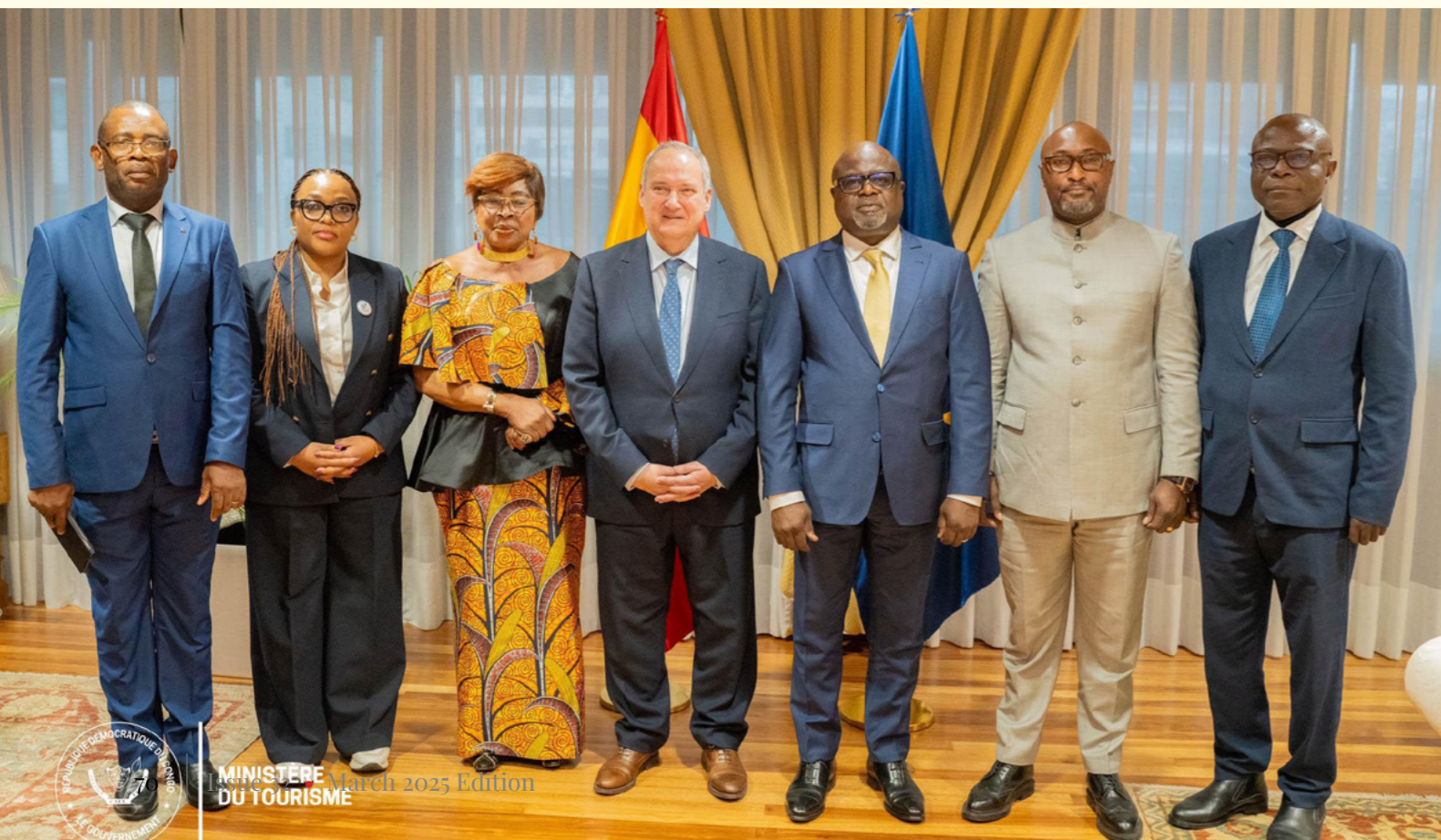
During his mission in Madrid, Minister Mpambia led the DRC delegation at FITUR and engaged with industry partners, private sector leaders, and tourism ecosystem stakeholders to explore potential collaborations. Additionally, he participated in the official launch of the 50th anniversary



of UN Tourism, reinforcing DRC's commitment to global tourism initiatives.

Beyond the festival, the Minister outlined plans for a tourist village concept—a dedicated space that will serve as a hub for tourism and its allied services. The proposed initiative aligns with DRC's broader efforts to establish structured tourism infrastructure that caters to both local and international visitors.

As the DRC prepares to host the Congo Rumba Festival, the country positions itself as a leader in cultural tourism, using music as a bridge to attract investment and promote destination marketing. The festival is set to be a milestone in leveraging cultural assets to drive tourism, reinforcing the link between heritage and economic development.



MINISTÈRE DU TOURISME March 2025 Edition

## Kriol Jazz Festival Expands to Águeda, Portugal

The Kriol Jazz Festival (KJF), a significant platform for Creole-inspired music, is set to make its debut in Águeda, Portugal, from April 10-12, 2025. This expansion marks a pivotal moment in the festival's history, strengthening cultural ties between Cape Verde and Europe while broadening its global reach.

Established as a cornerstone of Cape Verde's music scene, the Kriol Jazz Festival has gained recognition for showcasing the diversity of Creole music, blending African, Caribbean, and Latin American influences. Its introduction to Águeda provides a new audience with the opportunity to experience this rich musical heritage. The festival will feature performances by both established and emerging artistes, fostering cultural exchange and reinforcing KJF's role as a platform for global artistic collaboration.

Organized by Harmonia Lda in collaboration with the Council of Praia, the festival's primary mission is to celebrate Creole-inspired music from across the world. Whether from the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, Cape Verde, Europe, or Africa—the birthplace of Creole—KJF brings together artists who share a common cultural thread. This expansion to Águeda offers a fresh stage for these artists, further elevating Creole music's presence in the international music scene.

Águeda, known for its dynamic cultural initiatives, provides an ideal setting for KJF's European expansion. The city's commitment to artistic expression and multicultural events aligns with the festival's vision of uniting people through music. The event is expected to attract festival-goers from across Europe and beyond, enhancing the region's cultural tourism appeal.

The festival will present a carefully curated lineup featuring some of the most influential names in Creole jazz. Attendees can anticipate performances that celebrate musical fusion, as well as opportunities for networking and cultural dialogue. The festival aims to create an immersive experience where music serves as both an artistic expression and a bridge between nations.

By expanding to Águeda, the Kriol Jazz Festival solidifies its status as an international event that goes beyond entertainment. It champions Creole culture, fosters artistic exchange, and reinforces the importance of preserving and promoting diverse musical traditions. With its well-established reputation in Cape Verde, KJF's European presence is expected to elevate its influence in the global music industry.

As anticipation builds for the inaugural edition in Águeda, music lovers, cultural



enthusiasts, and tourism leaders alike will have the opportunity to experience an event that celebrates the essence of Creole music. The Kriol Jazz Festival's journey continues, forging new connections and expanding its global footprint.

## Moroccan National Tourism Office Strengthens Its Presence in the Chinese Market



The Moroccan National Tourism Office (MNTTO) participated in a strategic roadshow in Beijing and Shanghai (From February 17 to 22), capitalizing on the relaunch of RAM direct flights between Casablanca and Beijing and the newly introduced Shanghai-Casablanca route by China Eastern Airlines.

In partnership with the National Tourism Council (CNT), this initiative brought together key Moroccan tourism stakeholders—DMCs, hotels, and exclusive experiences—to engage with major Chinese travel platforms. As China's outbound tourism accelerates, Morocco is positioning itself in high-potential

segments, including luxury, bespoke travel, and small group experiences.

This initiative builds on the momentum of MNTTO's promotional efforts throughout 2024, including collaborations with major Chinese travel players, participation in ITB China 2024, and targeted campaigns across digital and social media platforms.

With a growing base of affluent travelers and expanded air connectivity, China represents a key market for Morocco's tourism strategy. This roadshow marks a significant step in strengthening ties and enhancing Morocco's appeal to Chinese travelers.

# KENTE:

## Ghana's Woven Pride Earns Global UNESCO Status

By: Samuel Obeng Appah

Ghana's legendary Kente cloth has earned a prestigious global spotlight with its inscription onto UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2024. This recognition, under the 2003 Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, solidifies the Kente fabric's importance not only as a vibrant and artistic textile but also as a symbol of Ghana's rich cultural history and creativity.

Originating from the Asante and Ewe communities of Ghana, Kente cloth has transcended its humble beginnings to become a powerful symbol of identity, creativity, and unity. Known for its striking patterns, bold colours, and intricate designs, the handwoven textile is more than just fabric; it is a narrative woven with threads of culture, history, and symbolism. Every Kente design carries deep meaning, often representing proverbs, historical events, or social values. As such, Kente is not merely an art form but also a dynamic vehicle of communication, reflecting the social and cultural histories of the Ghanaian people.

### The Craftsmanship and Symbolism of Kente

Kente production is a labour-intensive craft that demands skill, creativity, and dedication. The fabric is woven in

strips from silk, cotton, or rayon using horizontal looms. Each community of producers is typically led by a chief weaver, who ensures high production standards, resolves conflicts, and fosters knowledge exchange. This traditional craft has been passed down for generations, through family apprenticeships, master weavers, and formal education in schools and workshops. Both men and women contribute to Kente production—men often design the looms and tools, while women are primarily responsible for weaving and producing cotton yarn.

The choice of Kente's colours and designs often reflects the wearer's age, gender, and social status. For instance, red may symbolise sacrifice and spirituality, while gold conveys wealth and royalty. This symbolic richness makes Kente an essential element of major occasions, such as weddings, engagements, festivals, and funerals. Whether it is worn as a full garment or displayed as a sash, Kente embodies the pride, values, and identity of the Ghanaian people.

### Global Recognition and Cultural Impact

The vibrant patterns of Kente have earned worldwide admiration, making it a cultural icon beyond Ghana's borders. In recent years, Kente gained significant visibility when the Congressional Black

Caucus of the US Congress donned the cloth during President Trump's first State of the Union address. Similarly, its appearance in the globally acclaimed Black Panther movie in 2018 further amplified its status as a proud representation of African heritage.

Today, Kente has become a staple on celebratory occasions across the world. Graduating students, African diasporans, and dignitaries proudly wear Kente-adorned sashes and garments as a symbol of heritage, resilience, and achievement. Its global recognition is a testament to the fabric's powerful ability to transcend borders while remaining rooted in Ghanaian tradition.

### The Need for Preservation and Protection

While the UNESCO inscription is a monumental achievement, it also brings into focus the urgent need to preserve Kente's authenticity and history. In recent years, the fabric has faced increasing challenges from counterfeit products, particularly those mass-produced in countries like China. These cheap imitations not only dilute the cultural value of Kente but also undermine the livelihoods of local artisans who rely on the craft for economic sustenance.

The opening of the Kente Museum in Bonwire—widely regarded as the birthplace of Kente—earlier this year is a commendable step towards safeguarding its heritage. However, more must be done to establish similar facilities across the country, particularly in the Volta Region, which also boasts a rich Kente tradition. By promoting Kente museums, festivals, and weaving workshops, Ghana can strengthen its efforts to preserve the integrity of this craft while educating both locals and tourists about its significance.

### Kente and Ghana's Tourism Industry

Kente's new UNESCO status presents an exciting opportunity for Ghana to

boost its tourism sector. The vibrant and artistic appeal of Kente makes it an attractive draw for cultural tourists eager to experience Ghana's rich heritage firsthand. Tour operators can curate immersive experiences, including visits to Kente weaving villages, workshops, and festivals. Such initiatives not only create a deeper appreciation for the craft but also provide economic benefits to local communities.

Moreover, promoting Kente as a national treasure on global platforms can position Ghana as a cultural hub for African heritage. Events like the Akwasidae in the Ashanti Region,

Fetu Festival in Cape Coast and the Hogbetsotso Festival in the Volta Region provide ideal opportunities to showcase the artistry and cultural significance of Kente to the world. These festivals, adorned with colourful Kente displays, can become focal points for tourism promotion, attracting African Americans and diasporans seeking a connection to their roots.

### A Future Woven with Pride

Kente is more than a fabric; it is a living heritage that tells the story of Ghana's past, present, and future. Its recognition by UNESCO is not only a victory for

Ghana but also a call to action to protect and celebrate this cultural treasure. By investing in education, safeguarding its authenticity, and incorporating it into the tourism experience, Ghana can harness Kente's potential to drive cultural pride and economic growth.

As we celebrate Kente's global recognition, Ghanaians must take collective responsibility to ensure its preservation. Let Kente remain a symbol of identity, unity, and creativity for generations to come—a fabric woven not just with threads but with the spirit of a proud and vibrant nation.

## Attikié Earns UNESCO Recognition: A Milestone for Ivory Coast's Culinary and Cultural Heritage

Attikié, Ivory Coast's iconic dish made from fermented cassava, has been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This recognition was formalized at the 19th session for safeguarding intangible heritage held in Paraguay. The acknowledgment celebrates attikié's cultural significance, traditional preparation techniques, and its role in community life.

This recognition emphasizes the cultural and economic importance of attikié, showcasing its deep roots in Ivorian identity and its widespread impact across West Africa. It underscores UNESCO's mission to safeguard practices that connect communities and contribute to humanity's collective heritage.

Attikié, often nicknamed "Ivorian

couscous," is a staple made from grated, fermented cassava roots. Originating from the coastal regions of Ivory Coast centuries ago, it has become a culinary cornerstone across the country. The dish is versatile, often paired with grilled fish and served during meals and special ceremonies such as weddings, baptisms, and funerals.

More than just food, attikié represents a livelihood for many women in Ivory Coast. Its production—an intricate, multi-day process—has been traditionally led by women and passed down from generation to generation. This tradition includes peeling, grating, fermenting, pressing, drying, and steaming the cassava pulp. These skills, central to its preparation, were also recognized as intangible cultural heritage.

According to Ramata Ly-Bakayoko, Ivory Coast's UNESCO delegate, attikié is "deeply rooted in the daily lives of its communities." It is both a cultural and economic lifeline, empowering women through financial autonomy and sustaining households through its preparation and sale.

The UNESCO recognition highlights the importance of preserving not just the dish itself but also the traditional knowledge and skills associated with its preparation. The generational transfer of these skills ensures attikié's role as a cultural bridge in Ivorian society.

While attikié is a source of national pride, it has also sparked regional debates. In 2019, the recognition of a Burkinabe entrepreneur for her work with attikié at an Ivorian agricultural fair caused widespread uproar, emphasizing the dish's strong ties to Ivorian identity.

Earlier in 2024, the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO) registered a collective trademark for attikié to protect its authenticity, mirroring protections granted to champagne. This move aims to safeguard the cultural and economic value of attikié against imitation in other regions.

Attikié's inclusion in UNESCO's heritage list is an opportunity for Ivory Coast to further integrate its culinary heritage into its tourism offerings. Visitors can immerse themselves in its preparation process, connect with local producers, and experience its unique flavors during cultural tours and festivals.



# Tourism Calendar of Events

Mar 4-6 2025	<b>ITB Berlin</b> Venue: Berlin Exhibition Grounds, Germany Contact: +49(0)303038 Email: central@messe-berlin.de About: The World's Leading Travel Trade Show ® will take place at the Berlin Exhibition Grounds
Mar 12-16 2025	<b>Turismo Lisboa Travel Market (BTL)</b> Venue: Feira Internacional de Lisboa -Lisboa Contact: +351218921500 Email: btl@ccl.fil.pt About: Fostering new contacts and promoting the best business is one of BTL's premises. We count on you! The BTL is an event for professionals in the tourism sector which is an opportunity to find professional buyers. Analyze market trends and position their offer in an innovative and competitive way
Apr 6-9 2025	<b>ILTM Africa</b> Venue: Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa Contact: +44 20 8271 2127 Email: About: ILTM Africa gives leaders in the African luxury travel market every opportunity to re-connect, build relationships and grow their business. An invitation-only event, the very best travel agents from across the globe meet Africa's most spectacular luxury travel experience providers.
Apr 7-9 2025	<b>2025 Travel and Hospitality &amp; Tourism Education Summit</b> Venue: Mulungushi International Conference Centre - Lusaka, Zambia Contact: +27 82 5588214 Email: About: This promises three days of innovation, teamwork, and strategic planning. The event, which will be held at the esteemed Mulungushi International Conference Centre, aims to build on the incredible achievements of the previous year and further transform the travel and tourism industry..
Apr 8-10 2025	<b>2nd Africa Americas Summit</b> Venue: Livingstone, Zambia Contact: Email: rdaf@unwto.org About: Co-organized by UN Tourism and the Ministry of Tourism of Zambia, this summit will bring together Ministers of Tourism from Africa and the Americas, senior government officials, and key private sector stakeholders to foster dialogue, investment, and sustainable tourism development.
Apr 9-11 2025	<b>World Travel Market-Africa</b> Venue: Cape Town International Convention Centre Contact: +44 20 8271 2127 Email: About: World Travel Market Africa brings the world to you, and promotes Africa to the world, allowing you to explore a world of opportunities, all under one roof.
Apr 10-12 2025	<b>Kriol Jazz Festival 2025</b> Venue: Praia, Cape Verde Contact: (+238) 346 33 68 Email: harmonia.producao@gmail.com About: Organized by Harmonia Lda in partnership with the council of Praia, the Festival's main objective is to promote the Creole-inspired music from all the islands, whether in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, Cabo Verde, Europe or Africa, the cradle of Creole.
Apr 14-16 2025	<b>WTM Latin America 2025</b> Venue: São Paulo Contact: +55 11 3060-4717 Email: About: WTM Latin America is Latin America's B2B travel and tourism event offering excellent business opportunities, better return on investment and access to qualified buyers and influencers from the travel and tourism industry. Professionals from all areas, such as travel agencies, travel operators, accommodation, airlines, cruises, luxury products and technology, among others.

# Tourism Calendar of Events

Apr 23-25 2025	<b>2nd UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa</b> Venue: Arusha, Tanzania Contact: Email: rdaf@unwto.org About: The upcoming Regional Forum will convene destinations and international experts to explore the transformative potential of Gastronomy Tourism.
Apr-May 28-1 2025	<b>Arabian Travel Market 2025</b> Venue: Dubai - United Arab Emirates Contact: +44 20 8271 2127 Email: About: Arabian Travel Market is the gateway to truly global travel and tourism growth. For over three decades, there has been one goal - unlocking business potential for the travel trade industry. ATM is the single event that unites all travel sectors and verticals.
May 1-14 2025	<b>FIFA Beach Worldcup Seychelles 2025</b> Venue: Seychelles Contact: Email: About: The FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Seychelles 2025™ will take place between 1 and 11 May 2025 in Victoria, Mahé island.
May 5-9 2025	<b>We are Africa 2025</b> Venue: Magereza Ground Arusha, Tanzania Contact: Email: weareafrica@thisisbeyond.com About: We Are Africa is the world's most vibrant gathering of luxury african travel brands, the finest buyers and top international press. With a shared mission to transform and rebrand african travel for the global luxury market, the We Are Africa tribe celebrate the continent's diversity, unsurpassed beauty and incredible opportunity.
May 12-15 2025	<b>Africa's Travel Indaba</b> Venue: Durban, Kwazulu Natal, South Africa Contact: +27118953000 Email: convention@southafrica.net About: Africa's Travel Indaba is an iconic African leisure trade show, owned by South African Tourism, with the specific objective of creating market access for our vast array of African leisure tourism Products.
May 20-22 2025	<b>IMEX Frankfurt 2025</b> Venue: Frankfurt, Germany Contact: +44 1273 227311 Email: About: IMEX Frankfurt is where the global meetings, events and incentive travel industry comes together annually for the largest trade show of its kind in Europe
May 21-24 2025	<b>Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo (POATE) 2025</b> Venue: Kampala, Uganda Contact: +256414342196/197 Email: info@poate.co.ug About: Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo (POATE) is a tourism and trade exhibition which brings together regional and international tour operators, travel agents, destination agencies and various players in the tourism trade to network and to facilitate tourism business with Uganda's own domestic tourism trade that is composed of largely the tour operators, the hoteliers, conservationists and the government.
May 29-30 2025	<b>UN Tourism Executive Council – 123rd session</b> Venue: Madrid, Spain Contact: Email: rdaf@unwto.org About: The 123rd session of the UN Tourism Executive Council Meeting to be held in Madrid, Spain.

# Travel & Tourism Blitz



## Landtours Ghana expands legacy with acquisition of Elmina Bay Resort

Landtours, one of West Africa's leading tour operators based in Ghana, has announced its acquisition of the Elmina Bay Resort in Ghana this week. This milestone marks a significant turning point for the company, which has been operating for over three decades.

In an exclusive interview with VoyagesAfriq, Mona Boyd, Chairperson of Landtours Ghana, shared insights into the acquisition's significance and the company's plans to use it to deliver a first-class experience for their guests and clients.

### A vision for excellence

"When we learned that the resort was for sale, we saw an opportunity to fill a gap in the hotel market by offering a higher-end product, which doesn't exist in the Central and Western regions," Boyd explained. "We also saw an opportunity to control our supply chain and more importantly, maintain our standards of service at this destination."

According to Boyd, the acquisition aligns seamlessly with Landtours' overarching mission of providing world-class experiences for its clients. "When our clients travel to Kumasi and Accra, they stay in four-star hotels. However, when they visit Elmina, only two- and three-star hotels are available. The majority of our clients visit the castles and slave dungeons in Cape Coast and Elmina. With this hotel, we will be able to offer the same four-star standard experience throughout their stay in Ghana."

### Immediate changes on the horizon

Under Landtours' ownership, Elmina Bay Resort

is set to undergo a significant transformation. Boyd detailed some of the immediate changes guests can expect. "First, all of the rooms will be completely renovated to a higher standard. We plan to increase common spaces, adding two restaurants and bars, a well-fitted gym, a large conference space, and private balconies with ocean views in every room," she revealed.

Beyond physical upgrades, Boyd emphasised the importance of service. "We plan to intensively train the staff to ensure that we provide world-class hospitality and services," she said.

### Showcasing Ghana's cultural heritage

As a pioneer in Ghana's tourism industry, Landtours has always prioritised showcasing the country's rich cultural heritage. Boyd assured that this would be central to the guest experience at Elmina Bay Resort.

"We have had over 30 years of showing the best of Ghana to our clients. At the resort, we will offer customized, community-based immersive day experiences so guests can meet and get to know Ghanaians. We will also provide historical, adventure, and water sports-themed tours," she noted.

### A Hub for international and local tourists

Boyd expressed confidence that the resort would attract a diverse clientele. "We are projecting that 65% of our guests will come from the African Diaspora, Europe, North America, and Asia. We'll work hard to fill the remaining 35% with Ghanaian and West African guests," she said.



### Commitment to sustainability and community support

Sustainability and community impact are at the heart of Landtours' philosophy. Boyd highlighted the company's long-standing initiatives that benefit local communities.

"You probably don't know that Landtours already has several projects supporting local communities in five Ghanaian regions. We've been doing this for over 20 years," she explained. "Our first project was in the Northern Region at Mignori Village. Since then, we've worked with villages in the Eastern, Ashanti, Central, and Volta regions, as well as with NGOs in Accra. We will continue this work and develop new programs to bring the benefits of tourism to local communities across Ghana."

## Jean-Guy Afrika Appointed CEO of Rwanda Development Board



Rwanda's President Paul Kagame has appointed Jean-Guy Afrika as the new Chief Executive Officer of the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) on January 13, 2025. This transition follows Francis Gatare's tenure as he moves into his current role as Senior Economic Advisor to the President.

The appointment of Afrika, a seasoned public policy expert, marks a pivotal moment for RDB, a key institution in driving Rwanda's economic growth and positioning the country as a leading investment and tourism destination in Africa. With a wealth of experience in regional integration, export promotion, and institutional reform, Afrika's leadership is expected to further bolster Rwanda's appeal to global investors and tourists.

Prior to his appointment, Afrika served as Acting Director of the Regional Integration Coordination Office at the African Development Bank (AfDB) since December 2021. In this role, he was instrumental in shaping policies that strengthened regional integration across Africa.

Afrika's career trajectory includes notable contributions as Senior Policy Expert with the East African Community (EAC), where he supported the adoption and implementation

of key protocols and regulations that advanced regional trade and cooperation. His earlier role as Director of Export Promotion at the Rwanda Investment and Export Promotion Agency saw him champion policy reforms that enhanced Rwanda's business environment and sustained export growth.

Afrika's appointment comes at a time when Rwanda is focusing on cementing its status as a global tourism and investment hub. Under his stewardship, the RDB is expected to deepen its efforts in enhancing Rwanda's competitiveness in the global market while driving sustainable development across sectors, including tourism.

His expertise in regional trade, economic integration, and strategic leadership positions him to lead the RDB in fostering partnerships, attracting foreign investment, and ensuring Rwanda remains a top destination for business and leisure.

# Travel & Tourism Blitz



## Marriott International Appoints Johan Cronjé as Regional Vice President for Sub-Saharan Africa

Marriott International has announced the appointment of Johan Cronjé as its new Regional Vice President for Sub-Saharan Africa. Based in Cape Town, Cronjé oversees the company's managed and franchised operations across the region, supporting Marriott International's growing presence in Sub-Saharan Africa.

With over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Cronjé is a seasoned leader renowned for his operational expertise and strong leadership capabilities. Having started his career with Protea Hotels by Marriott in 2001, he has held a range of key roles within Marriott International, making significant contributions to the company's success in the region.

Neal Jones, Chief Operating Officer, Europe and Africa, Premium & Select, Marriott International, said: "Johan is an outstanding leader with a deep understanding of the Sub-Saharan Africa market and a proven track record of operational excellence. His leadership will be pivotal as we continue to strengthen our presence in the region, deliver exceptional guest experiences, and seize new growth opportunities. We are thrilled to have Johan at the helm in this important role."

Cronjé's distinguished career journey reflects

his dedication and ability to drive results. His notable achievements include serving as General Manager at the Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! by Marriott Cape Town. He went on to lead the Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! by Marriott Menlyn as the opening General Manager before advancing to Regional General Manager, overseeing a portfolio of properties in South Africa and Tanzania.

In 2019, Cronjé was appointed opening General Manager of the Johannesburg Marriott Hotel Melrose Arch and Marriott Executive Apartments. By 2021, he had taken on the role of Cluster General Manager, managing a collection of properties within the Melrose Arch Precinct. Most recently, he served as Area Director of Operations, Sub-Saharan Africa, where he successfully led operational disciplines and key business initiatives across the region.

Cronjé said: "It is an honour to take on the role of Regional Vice President for this dynamic and diverse region. Sub-Saharan Africa is an important growth market for Marriott International. I look forward to working alongside our talented teams, owners and partners to deliver exceptional guest experiences, drive performance, and expand our footprint, helping to shape the future of travel



and hospitality across Sub-Saharan Africa."

Marriott International's portfolio in Sub-Saharan Africa features more than 110 properties and over 14,300 rooms across 18 countries. Its robust portfolio in the region includes a diverse selection of 18 hotel brands, such as Protea Hotels by Marriott, Marriott Hotels, Sheraton, Westin Hotels & Resorts, Autograph Collection, and JW Marriott, catering to travellers across a wide range of price points, locations and trip purposes.

## South African Tourism names Darryl Erasmus as new COO



South African Tourism (SA Tourism) has announced the appointment of Darryl Erasmus as the organisation's new Chief Operations Officer with effect 07 January 2025.

As Chief Operations Officer, Darryl will be responsible for the oversight role of South African Tourism's Corporate Services functions, while supporting and ensuring effective operations of its internal business units. In addition, he will fulfill the responsibility of driving in-country localisation and execution of global strategies.

Darryl, who previously worked for South African Tourism as Chief Quality Assurance

Officer in the Tourism Grading Council business unit, brings a wealth of expertise and leadership experience having worked in the hospitality, tourism, and corporate communications sectors. His other roles have seen him hold senior marketing, sales, and leadership roles with brands such as Travelport, Protea Hotels, and Intercontinental Hotels. He was also Managing Director at BLAZE Integrated Hospitality Marketing Agency which specialises in integrated marketing communications. Most recently he provided advisory and consulting skills for commercial services in the tourism and hospitality sector, in the form of Director at DAX Advisory Services.

"We are pleased to welcome Darryl Erasmus back to South African Tourism as our new Chief Operations Officer. This appointment will not only strengthen our management structures but will also contribute to driving our strategic objectives forward, while improving our destination's competitiveness. I have no doubt that his leadership will enhance our operational excellence and global impact," said Nombulelo Guliwe, SA Tourism Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Erasmus notes: "I'm excited to be rejoining SA Tourism, returning to an organisation for which

I have a deep affinity and personal connection. I extend my sincere gratitude to the CEO and Board for the opportunity to serve South Africa and the tourism sector at large once again. I am committed to collectively building a capable and high-performance entity that champions the growth of tourism, amplifying its economic impact, raising the sector's profile, and displaying the beauty of our country to the global community.

Darryl's appointment was approved by the South Africa Tourism board in December 2024. He is completing a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Studies from Henley Business School; has completed a Postgraduate Global Executive Development Program from GIBS; and a Bachelor of Commerce in Marketing and Business Management from Oxford Brookes University. He also has qualifications in Financial Management, Training Management, Manager Development, Marketing and Business Management.

"I eagerly anticipate reconnecting with the team and collaborating with industry stakeholders domestically and abroad to promote our exceptional destination that delivers unforgettable and uniquely authentic South African experiences," ends Darryl.

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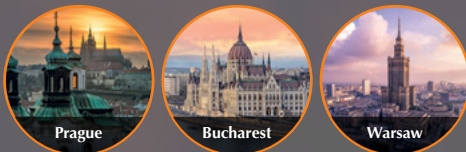
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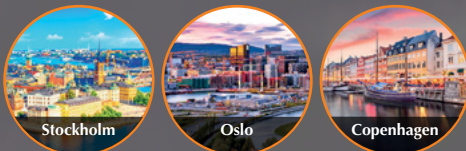
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