

# VoyagesAfric

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Africa's Leading Travel and Tourism Magazine

## Riyadh welcomes global tourism leaders for the 26<sup>th</sup> UN Tourism General Assembly



**UN Tourism**  
26<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA 7 - 11 NOVEMBER 2025

Zurab Pololikashvili,  
UN Tourism Secretary General

Ahmed Al Khateeb,  
Minister of Tourism- Kingdom  
of Saudi Arabia

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Travel and Tourism Magazine

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Dear Cherished Reader,

As we present this special General Assembly edition of VoyagesAfriq, the global travel community finds itself at a meaningful crossroads – a moment that blends continuity with renewal. This November, Riyadh is hosting the 26th UN Tourism General Assembly, an event that is more than a meeting; it is a pivotal moment in shaping how our sector moves forward. The anticipated confirmation of Shaikha Al Nowais as the organisation's first woman Secretary-General in fifty years represents both generational renewal and a significant step forward for gender representation in global governance. It invites renewed optimism about inclusive leadership and the future of international tourism cooperation.

This leadership transition takes place alongside the legacy of outgoing Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, whose tenure has been defined by reform and resilience. His time in office brought institutional transformation, including the rebranding to UN Tourism and a deliberate widening of the organisation's reach – most visibly through the opening of the African Regional Office in Morocco, which has given the continent a stronger and more direct voice in global tourism deliberations. Riyadh will build on that momentum, with artificial intelligence emerging as a central theme, culminating in the anticipated Riyadh Declaration on AI in Tourism – a collective commitment to the ethical and thoughtful integration of technology across the sector.

Across Africa, parallel shifts are translating policy into tangible progress. South Africa's announcement of R1 billion in investment-ready tourism projects is



Kojo Bentum-Williams



clear evidence that long-term planning is being matched with execution. The country's regulatory reforms and new electronic travel authorisation system signal a modern and accessible approach to visitor facilitation. Cabo Verde's reorientation towards nature and rural tourism is broadening its appeal beyond the traditional sun-and-sea model, while Ghana's December in GH 2025 initiative demonstrates how cultural tourism can serve as a dynamic engine for local economic growth. Angola's refreshed identity – Visit Angola: The Rhythm of Life – captures the country's cultural vitality and national confidence.

Institutional evolution across the continent continues to inspire. The founding of the Eko Tourism Foundation positions Lagos as a future hub for West African tourism, while Malawi's ministerial consolidation under Dr George Partridge reflects a more cohesive policy framework for the sector. Ghana's diplomatic efforts, led by Ambassador Regina Appiah-Sam in Spain, further reinforce how

tourism has become integral to foreign relations and national branding.

The private sector's contribution remains decisive. Meta's four-month tourism upskilling programme for Sub-Saharan Africa responds to the urgent need for digital literacy, equipping practitioners with tools to reach global audiences. The Tourism Investment Forum for Africa (TIFA) underscores the growing ecosystem of partnerships required to attract responsible investment and build sustainable ventures.

We also celebrate destinations that are telling their stories with purpose and pride. The Seychelles' Nature Trail showcases the harmony between sport and sustainability, Sierra Leone's Gola-Tiwai Complex achieving UNESCO World Heritage status affirms conservation as a cornerstone of tourism, and the Essence of Africa 2025 in Malindi reinforces the continent's creativity and resilience. On the global stage, Angola's selection as official host of ITB Berlin 2026

and Africa's debut on the Meetings Industry Trendsetters List signal growing recognition of the continent as a preferred destination for business events and high-level gatherings.

At VoyagesAfriq, our mission remains to tell these stories with care, depth and perspective. This edition explores how technology, community growth, environmental responsibility and strategic partnerships can converge to drive a more inclusive and resilient tourism future. The path ahead will carry both challenge and promise, and success will depend on clear policy, patient investment and collaboration between governments, industry and communities.






Thank you for joining us as we chronicle this evolving chapter in travel and tourism. We hope these pages offer insight, spark meaningful conversation and inspire leaders and practitioners to act with purpose, creativity and integrity.

Have a great read!

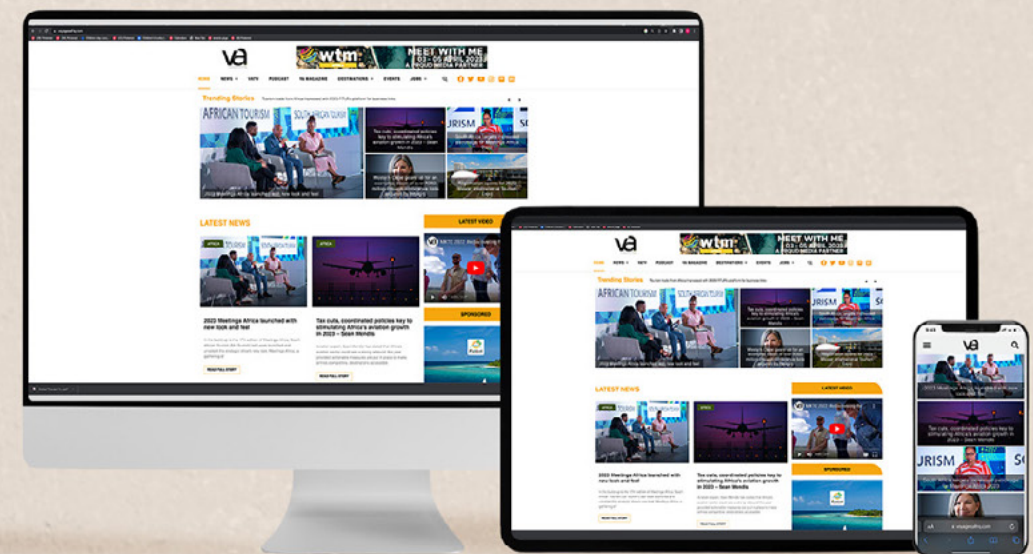


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# Riyadh welcomes global tourism leaders for the 26<sup>th</sup> UN Tourism General Assembly

The global tourism community will turn its gaze to Riyadh this November, as the Saudi capital prepares to host the 26th General Assembly of UN Tourism. Taking place from 7 to 11 November 2025, the gathering promises to be one of the most consequential in the organisation's fifty-year history — not only because of its ambitious agenda and forward-looking themes, but also because it marks a major milestone in global tourism leadership.

For the first time, the agency is set to appoint a woman to its top post. Shaikha Al Nowais of the United Arab Emirates, whose nomination was endorsed by the Executive Council earlier this year in Segovia, Spain, is expected to be ratified as Secretary-General during the Riyadh session. Her appointment would mark a new chapter for UN Tourism, symbolising both a generational and gender breakthrough in the governance of international tourism.

A global gathering with far-reaching purpose

The General Assembly remains the



Ahmed Al Khateeb, Minister of Tourism  
– The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

supreme decision-making body of UN Tourism, convening every two years to approve the organisation's budget, determine its programme of work, and deliberate on pressing global tourism issues. It is, in essence, the parliament

of world tourism — bringing together ministers, policymakers, industry leaders, academics, and representatives of international organisations to chart the course for a sector that contributes over ten percent of global GDP.



UN Tourism Secretary General Zurab  
Pololikashvili and Saudi Tourism Minister  
Ahmed Al Khateeb

Riyadh's hosting of the Assembly is of particular symbolic and strategic importance. Over the past five years, Saudi Arabia has transformed itself into one of the most dynamic tourism frontiers in the world, spearheading sweeping reforms under Vision 2030 to diversify its economy away from oil. The Kingdom surpassed 100 million visitors in 2023, was named host of the 2034 FIFA World Cup, and has launched mega projects such as NEOM, the Red Sea development, and Diriyah Gate — all designed to position it as a global destination for culture, leisure, and innovation.

The city of Riyadh also serves as the home of the UN Tourism Middle East Regional Office, the first of its kind outside Madrid. This office coordinates several key programmes, particularly in rural tourism and regional development, reinforcing Saudi Arabia's growing influence within the global tourism landscape. The country will also use the Assembly as a platform to launch TOURISE, a bold new initiative described as the world's leading forum for shaping the future of tourism through technology, sustainability, and investment.

## The essence of the General Assembly

The Riyadh session comes at a transformative moment for the global tourism industry. In the wake of the pandemic, with climate change, digital transformation, and economic shifts reshaping travel behaviour, the General Assembly will serve as a venue to realign tourism's priorities for the coming decade.

The core meetings will be held on 9 and

10 November, when member states will review the provisional agenda, approve the work programme, and deliberate on strategic directions for 2026–2029. Surrounding the Assembly will be the 124th and 125th sessions of the Executive Council, to be held on 8 and 11 November respectively. These meetings will examine the organisation's governance, finances, and operational priorities while ushering in new members to the Council, including fresh representatives from Africa.

A series of committee sessions will also be convened within the framework of the Assembly. These include the Committee on Statistics, the Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness, the Committee on Tourism and Sustainability, and the Programme and Budget Committee,

“ The Riyadh session comes at a transformative moment for the global tourism industry. In the wake of the pandemic, with climate change, digital transformation, and economic shifts reshaping travel behaviour, the General Assembly will serve as a venue to realign tourism's priorities for the coming decade ”

alongside affiliate membership meetings that bring together public and private sector stakeholders. Each of these forums will play a crucial role in shaping resolutions and guiding principles that will later be debated in the plenary sessions.

## Innovation and Artificial Intelligence take centre stage

Among the highlights of the Riyadh Assembly will be a special thematic session dedicated to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its impact on global tourism. The event will open with a keynote address exploring how AI is transforming the sector — from smart destination management to predictive analytics, immersive experiences, and sustainability tracking.

A high-level panel will follow, featuring experts and innovators discussing the creation of a global AI framework for tourism, ensuring that technological progress is guided by ethics, inclusion, and accessibility. The session will also

UN Tourism Secretary General Zurab Pololikashvili  
addressing one of the Executive Council Sessions





the finale of the UN Tourism Global AI Challenge, where young innovators and startups will present groundbreaking solutions to real-world tourism problems.

In a futuristic twist, the Assembly will feature interactive demonstrations of AI-driven tools, complete with live data visualisations and immersive technology showcases. Networking itself will take on a digital dimension, as an AI-powered matchmaking system connects delegates based on shared interests and collaboration potential. The event will culminate in the unveiling of the Riyadh Declaration on AI in Tourism, a landmark statement reaffirming the sector's commitment to responsible innovation and technological equity.

#### Zurab Pololikashvili – A Legacy of Transformation and Transition at UN Tourism

Zurab Pololikashvili's tenure as Secretary-General of UN Tourism marks one of the most transformative periods in the organisation's fifty-year history. Appointed in 2018 during a time of relative global stability, he would soon face the greatest challenge in modern tourism history with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic two years into his first tenure.

Under his leadership, UN Tourism (formerly the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)) evolved from a largely advisory body to an active global force shaping tourism policy, investment, and innovation. His departure at the close of 2025 signifies not only the end

of an era but the start of a new chapter under his successor, Shaikha Al Nowais.

#### The Power of Rebranding and Repositioning

The experienced Georgian politician and diplomat, Pololikashvili, entered office with a commitment to modernise the institution. One of his landmark achievements was the rebranding of UNWTO to UN Tourism. This strategic shift was not cosmetic but conceptual, as it repositioned the organisation as a modern, global tourism authority aligned with the United Nations system.

The streamlined identity strengthened global recognition, enhanced credibility with investors and governments, and reaffirmed tourism as a pillar of social and economic development. As noted by Pololikashvili at the time: "As society



## UN Tourism

progresses, the tourism sector, much like many other sectors, needs to transform to serve as a catalyst for prosperity at a universal scale".

Borja Borrero, Executive Director at Interbrand, reinforced this view: "Transitioning from UNWTO to UN Tourism marks a significant new phase for the organisation. The revised nomenclature offers several advantages, including simplicity, enhanced



The Secretary-General and Spain's Tourism Minister Jordi Hereu inspect the new UN Tourism headquarters under construction







comprehension, improved legibility, and memorability. It also serves to clarify the agency's sphere of influence within the global tourism industry. The new elements of the brand are the foundations of a distinct and proprietary image – one that is direct, relatable, and relevant for diverse audiences”.

#### Championing Resilience Through Crisis

When the pandemic struck in early 2020, global travel ground to a halt. Borders closed, airlines were grounded, and millions of tourism jobs were endangered or lost. At a time when the industry faced existential uncertainty, Pololikashvili championed resilience.

Under his guidance, UN Tourism led the creation of the Global Tourism Crisis Committee, coordinating with governments, health authorities, and private sector leaders. His advocacy for safe travel corridors, harmonised protocols, and financial support mechanisms helped pave the road to recovery. Tourism subsequently emerged as one of the fastest recovering sectors post-pandemic – a feat widely credited to coordinated international leadership.

#### Long-Term Progress and Structural Expansion

Beyond crisis management, Pololikashvili prioritised long-term structural progress. He launched the Best Tourism Villages initiative, recognising rural destinations for excellence in sustainability, culture, and innovation. This initiative resonated globally, particularly in developing regions where rural tourism offers significant economic potential.

Led the reinvigoration of the UN Tourism Academy, expanding educational access and building capacity for the next

generation of tourism professionals through partnerships with leading institutions.

While in Zambia in April during a Tourism and Hospitality Training event, Pololikashvili noted that: “Our task here is to determine how education can serve as both an entry point and an engine for a resilient, inclusive tourism sector. The industry is evolving, and so too must our systems of education and training”.

inclusivity. This marked the first time UN Tourism would have a permanent presence on the African continent – a milestone Pololikashvili described as the beginning of a new era. “From today, our relationship is moving to another level of partnership with all our African member states,” he noted at the launch. The thematic office provides African countries with access to resources to drive sustainable tourism development, improve investment opportunities, and enhance regional cooperation.



Morocco's Minister of Tourism Fatim Ammor and the UN Tourism SG sign the official agreement for the hosting of Africa's first thematic office

**“Transitioning from UNWTO to UN Tourism marks a significant new phase for the organisation. The revised nomenclature offers several advantages, including simplicity, enhanced comprehension, improved legibility, and memorability. It also serves to clarify the agency's sphere of influence within the global tourism industry.”**

His tenure also saw an unprecedented expansion of UN Tourism's physical presence, with regional offices established to bring the organisation closer to its member states. The Middle East Regional Office in Riyadh, inaugurated in 2021, focused on rural and regional development, while the office in Brazil established a stronger presence in the Americas.

An African Regional thematic office established in Morocco and dedicated to innovation for Africa underscores his commitment to decentralisation and



#### Africa at the Core of the Vision

Indeed, Africa occupied a central place in his leadership vision. He advocated for fair representation and encouraged African member states to take more active roles in global tourism governance. Under his stewardship, investment forums, capacity-building missions, and tourism innovation challenges were held across the continent. His presence at key African events, from Rabat to Arusha, helped elevate Africa's tourism agenda on the world stage.

Another important African legacy project his leadership initiated is the Regional Gastronomy Forum for Africa. First held in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, in 2024, with a second in Arusha, Tanzania, in April 2025, and a third planned for Sierra Leone, the strategy is to empower African destinations to elevate their culinary heritage into marketable tourism products.

“Zurab's leadership has been truly transformational in unlocking the vast potential that sports and tourism hold for young people, particularly across Africa,” says former Chelsea FC star and UN Tourism Responsible Tourism Ambassador, Didier Drogba. “He has played a key role in creating meaningful opportunities for many young Africans, using tourism as a powerful force for good”.

#### Partnerships, Innovation, and Continuity

Institutional transparency and partnerships were core to his reform agenda. He deepened collaboration with the World Bank, International Finance Corporation (IFC), and regional development banks, aiming to mobilise investment for sustainable tourism infrastructure, particularly in emerging

**“Zurab's leadership has been truly transformational in unlocking the vast potential that sports and tourism hold for young people, particularly across Africa”**

destinations. He also championed public-private dialogue through enhanced Affiliate Member engagement, encouraging major hospitality groups, airlines, and technology firms to co-create tourism solutions.

As the sector embraced digital transformation, Pololikashvili placed innovation at the heart of UN Tourism. Start-up competitions, tourism tech forums, and AI-focused dialogues became regular features of the organisation's programme of work. His legacy includes laying the foundation for UN Tourism's future involvement in artificial intelligence governance, a topic set to feature prominently at the General Assembly in Riyadh.

Yet, his leadership was not without challenges. The demands of a rapidly changing world required balancing recovery with sustainability, as climate change, overtourism, and workforce development all became critical

A front view of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia





concerns. Nonetheless, his strategic approach ensured that sustainability remained central, promoting tourism as a driver of green jobs, heritage protection, and community resilience.

As he prepares to hand over leadership, Pololikashvili has emphasised continuity. His public endorsement of Shaikha Al Nowais signals a deliberate and unified transition. He has urged member states to support the incoming leadership and remain focused on collective progress rather than division.

Zurab Pololikashvili leaves behind an institution stronger, more visible, and more influential than when he arrived. He steered UN Tourism through turbulence and transformation, all while building the foundation for a new era.

As Shaikha Al Nowais prepares to assume office, she inherits a modernised organisation, a revitalised global network, and a mandate charged with ambition.

His parting message has been clear – tourism must remain a force for peace, development, and opportunity.

In his remarks following the Executive Council vote in Madrid last May, Pololikashvili praised the significance of the moment and the symbolism of Al Nowais' win. "This is the first time UN



Tourism will have a woman in leadership. It is quite a big achievement," he said. "Behind this achievement is a very good example of how a country from scratch can develop and develop tourism"

#### Final Sentiment

African ministers and stakeholders have often acknowledged Zurab's accessibility and commitment, noting

how he ensured Africa had a stronger voice within global tourism governance and brought UN Tourism initiatives closer to communities through programmes such as Best Tourism Villages and regional investment forums. These sentiments reflect how deeply his outreach resonated beyond urban centres, into community tourism and youth entrepreneurship. The story of



his leadership will be remembered not only in milestones achieved but in the resilience he helped embed in global tourism.

His transition marks the close of one chapter and the beginning of another. With Shaikha Al Nowais set to become the first woman to lead UN Tourism, he leaves the organisation poised for continuity amid change.

#### Strengthening Public-Private collaboration

UN Tourism's Affiliate Members and Public-Private Collaboration Department (AM-PPC) will again play a key role in this Assembly. Serving as the bridge between governments and the private sector, the department facilitates dialogue, co-creation, and partnership building. The Board of Affiliate Members will meet in Riyadh to align private-sector initiatives with the organisation's broader strategic vision, ensuring that innovation, investment, and sustainability efforts are harmonised globally.

These partnerships are particularly crucial as tourism faces mounting challenges—from the climate crisis and economic inequalities to rapid digitalisation and shifting traveller expectations. The Assembly's outcomes will help shape frameworks that allow both public institutions and private

companies to collaborate more effectively in the years ahead.

#### Africa's representation and growing influence

Africa is set to once again take a prominent role on the global tourism stage at the 26th General Assembly. The continent currently holds eleven seats on the UN Tourism Executive Council – a testament to its growing influence in shaping the future of the sector.

During the Council sessions held in Riyadh, a new group of African representatives will be inaugurated. As the 124th Executive Council Meeting

concludes, Cabo Verde, South Africa, Mozambique, and Morocco will complete their term of service.

Meanwhile, Zambia has secured a renewed mandate and will continue alongside existing Council members Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Rwanda. They will be joined by five new members: Angola, Kenya, Seychelles and Zimbabwe.

These developments signal a dynamic and unified African presence within UN Tourism's leadership, reinforcing the continent's commitment to global collaboration and tourism development.





African member states are expected to push for stronger support for sustainable investment, community-based tourism, and skills development across the continent. Their participation will also highlight Africa's growing influence within global tourism governance – reflecting the continent's status as one of the fastest-growing tourism regions in the world.

#### Anticipation and global significance

As Riyadh prepares to host delegates from across the globe, the 26th UN Tourism General Assembly stands poised to shape the next chapter of the world's most dynamic industry. Its significance lies not just in the decisions to be taken, but in the broader message it sends: that tourism, when guided by innovation, inclusivity and international cooperation, remains a powerful force for sustainable development.

With the unveiling of TOURISE, the adoption of the Riyadh Declaration on AI, and the historic confirmation of the



organisation's first female Secretary-General, the Assembly will symbolise renewal and progress – setting the

stage for a new era where technology, leadership and collaboration converge to redefine the global tourism landscape.



# 26<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to Mark Golden Jubilee: Honoring the Past, Inspiring the Future

*Half a century since its founding, UN Tourism stands at the intersection of legacy and transformation – and at the dawn of a new era in global tourism governance.*

As the global tourism community prepares to converge in Riyadh this November for the 26th UN Tourism General Assembly, the gathering carries special significance. It coincides with the organisation's 50th anniversary, marking five decades of leadership, cooperation and transformation in shaping the global tourism agenda.

From its beginnings as the International Union of Official Travel Organisations (IUOTO) in the 1940s to its formal establishment as the World Tourism Organization in 1975, and now its evolution into UN Tourism, the institution has stood as a unifying force for nations, cultures and communities. Over the years, successive Secretaries-General have left marks on its progress – from Robert Lonati's foundational work to Francesco Frangialli's era of policy consolidation and Taleb Rifai's people-centred vision for sustainable and inclusive tourism.

Under Zurab Pololikashvili's stewardship since 2018, UN Tourism has undergone a deep transformation. He has repositioned the organisation within the UN system, guided the sector through the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis, and decentralised its operations through new regional offices in Saudi Arabia and Brazil as well as thematic offices in Uzbekistan and the Kingdom of Morocco. His administration has championed innovation, education, investment and youth empowerment as levers for tourism-led development, while rebranding the organisation to reflect its expanded mission as a pillar of peace, prosperity and planetary stewardship.

# 50 UN Tourism Anniversary

As the organisation celebrates its golden jubilee, it also stands on the brink of a historic transition. In a landmark decision earlier this year, the UN Tourism Executive Council nominated Shaikha Al Nowais of the United Arab Emirates as the next Secretary-General, to succeed Pololikashvili in January 2026, pending ratification by the General Assembly in Riyadh.

Her nomination represents a symbolic and substantive milestone – the potential appointment of the first woman to lead the organisation, and a recognition of the Gulf region's growing role in shaping the future of global tourism.

Riyadh provides a fitting stage for this commemoration – a city that has rapidly emerged as a centre of ambition and innovation within the global tourism

landscape. As the host of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East and the 26th General Assembly, Saudi Arabia's leadership underscores the spirit of collaboration and investment that defines the next chapter of global tourism development.

Fifty years on, UN Tourism remains steadfast in its mission to ensure that tourism is not merely about movement, but about meaning – about building bridges of understanding and opportunity across borders. As delegates gather in Riyadh, they do so to honour the past, celebrate the present and chart a shared vision for the decades ahead. The 50th anniversary is not just a milestone, but a moment to reaffirm tourism's enduring purpose: to connect the world through peace, partnership and progress.





Venue: Mandarin Oriental Hotel

A/26/prog.rev.2  
Madrid, 10 October 2025  
Original: English

Friday 7 November	12:30-14:30	Committee on Statistics <i>Room: Omsiat 2 (En)</i>
	12:30-14:30	Plenary of Affiliate Members <i>Room: Pavilion area (En, Sp, Ar)</i>
	12:30-14:00	Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness <i>Room: Omsiat 1 (En)</i>
	13:30-15:30	Lunch <i>Pavilion area</i>
	15:00-18:00	Programme and Budget Committee <i>Room: Prince Sultan (En, Sp, Fr)</i>
	15:30-18:30	Committee on Statistics <i>Room: Omsiat 2 (En)</i>
	15:30-18:30	Plenary of Affiliate Members <i>Room: Pavilion area (En, Sp, Ar)</i>
	20:00-22:00	Riyadh Discovery Experience Dinners (choice-based)
Saturday 8 November	08:30-10:00	Committee on Matters Related to Affiliate Membership <i>Room: Omsiat 1 (En, Sp)</i>
	10:00-13:00	Committee on Statistics <i>Room: Omsiat 2 (En)</i>
	11:00-12:30	Affiliate Members Corner <i>Room: Pavilion area (En)</i>
	12:00-13:30	Committee on Tourism and Sustainability <i>Room: Omsiat 1 (En)</i>
	13:00-14:30	UN Tourism Tech Adventure: Grand Final of the UN Tourism Artificial Intelligence Challenge <i>Room: Pavilion area (En)</i>
	13:30-15:00	Lunch <i>Pavilion area</i>
	15:00-18:00	<b>124th session of the Executive Council</b> <i>Room: Prince Sultan (En, Sp, Fr, Ru, Ar, Ch)</i>
	20:00-22:00	Opening Welcome Dinner at Diriyah for Heads of Delegations - A Celebration of Saudi Hospitality (by invitation) / Riyadh Discovery Experience Dinners (choice-based)
Sunday 9 November	10:00-13:00	<b>General Assembly – Opening Ceremony &amp; First Plenary</b> <i>Room: Prince Sultan (En, Sp, Fr, Ru, Ar, Ch)</i>
	13:00-15:00	Lunch <i>Pavilion area</i>
	15:00-18:00	<b>General Assembly – Second Plenary</b> <i>Room: Prince Sultan (En, Sp, Fr, Ru, Ar, Ch)</i>
	20:00-22:00	UN Tourism 50th Anniversary Grand Celebration, Boulevard City and Boulevard World – Riyadh Season

Sunday 9 November	10:00-13:00	<b>General Assembly – Opening Ceremony &amp; First Plenary</b> <i>Room: Prince Sultan (En, Sp, Fr, Ru, Ar, Ch)</i>
	13:00-15:00	Lunch <i>Pavilion area</i>
	15:00-18:00	<b>General Assembly – Second Plenary</b> <i>Room: Prince Sultan (En, Sp, Fr, Ru, Ar, Ch)</i>
	20:00-22:00	UN Tourism 50th Anniversary Grand Celebration, Boulevard City and Boulevard World – Riyadh Season
Monday 10 November	09:00-09:45	Associate Members Meeting <i>Room: Omsiat 1 (En)</i>
	10:00-12:00	<b>Thematic session: “The Impact of Artificial Intelligence and Innovation in Shaping Global Tourism”</b> <i>Room: Prince Sultan (En, Sp, Fr, Ru, Ar, Ch)</i>
	12:00-13:00	<b>General Assembly – Third Plenary</b> <i>Room: Prince Sultan (En, Sp, Fr, Ru, Ar, Ch)</i>
	13:30-15:00	Lunch <i>Pavilion area</i>
	15:00-18:00	<b>General Assembly – Fourth Plenary</b> <i>Room: Prince Sultan (En, Sp, Fr, Ru, Ar, Ch)</i>
	20:00-22:00	TOURISE Opening Ceremony for Heads of Delegations at Qiddiya (by invitation) / Riyadh Discovery Experience Dinners (choice-based)
Tuesday 11 November	10:00-12:00	<b>125th session of the Executive Council</b> <i>Room: Prince Sultan (En, Sp, Fr, Ru, Ar, Ch)</i>
	12:00-14:00	<i>Affiliate Members Board</i> <i>Room: Omsiat 1 (En, Sp)</i>
Friday 7 November	13:45-17:15	<i>A sensory tour into Saudi heritage</i>
	18:00-23:30	<i>A sensory tour into Saudi heritage</i> <i>(This shift includes dinner at Assoulina Restaurant)</i>
	14:00-17:30	<i>A cultural journey of discovery</i>
	15:45-17:45	<i>From innovation to inspiration</i>
Saturday 8 November	18:15- 22:45	<i>From innovation to inspiration</i> <i>(This shift includes dinner at Casa Myrra Restaurant)</i>
	09:30-13:00	<i>A sensory tour into Saudi heritage</i>
	13:45-17:15	<i>A sensory tour into Saudi heritage</i> <i>(This shift includes dinner at Assoulina Restaurant)</i>
	18:00-23:30	<i>A sensory tour into Saudi heritage</i> <i>(This shift includes dinner at Assoulina Restaurant)</i>
	9:45-13:00	<i>A cultural journey of discovery</i>
	14:00-17:30	<i>From innovation to inspiration</i>
Tuesday 11 November	18:15- 22:45	<i>From innovation to inspiration</i> <i>(This shift includes dinner at Casa Myrra Restaurant)</i>
	09:30-13:00	<i>A sensory tour into Saudi heritage</i>
	13:45-17:15	<i>A sensory tour into Saudi heritage</i> <i>(This shift includes dinner at Assoulina Restaurant)</i>
	18:00-23:30	<i>A sensory tour into Saudi heritage</i> <i>(This shift includes dinner at Assoulina Restaurant)</i>
	9:45-13:00	<i>A cultural journey of discovery</i>
	14:00-17:30	<i>From innovation to inspiration</i>
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	13:45-17:15	<i>A sensory tour into Saudi heritage</i> <i>(This shift includes dinner at Assoulina Restaurant)</i>

*A cultural journey of discovery* - Curator-led tour of Al Murabba Palace, the National Museum of Saudi Arabia, and Al Masmak Fortress, offering insights into key moments in the Kingdom's history

*A sensory tour into Saudi heritage* - A private tour of Diriyah, led by a historian, takes guests through At-Turaif and Al Bujairi Heritage Park, highlighting Saudi cultural roots

*From innovation to inspiration* - Explore the ways in which Vision 2030 is fostering an environment of creativity and artistic expression in Riyadh. Redefining Riyadh's skyline with outstanding buildings inspired by the native landscape





Shaikha Al Nowais

## Shaikha Nasser Al Nowais – Ushering a New Era at UN Tourism

Shaikha Nasser Al Nowais's rise to the position of Secretary-General of UN Tourism marks an unprecedented milestone in the institution's fifty-year history. Set to become the first woman to lead the organisation from 1 January 2026, her nomination by the Executive Council in May represents not only a symbolic breakthrough but the beginning of a generational shift in global tourism leadership.

Her tenure as leader of global tourism will commence at a time when tourism is navigating profound transformation – shaped by post pandemic reset, climate responsibility, digital innovation, shifting traveller expectations, and a renewed focus on resilience.

As the outgoing UN Tourism Secretary-

General, Zurab Pololikashvili, noted following the Executive Council vote in Madrid last May, Al Nowais' nomination was a very significant event. "This is the first time UN Tourism will have a woman in leadership. It is quite a big achievement," he said.

### A Foundation in Corporate and Strategic Governance

Al Nowais' background is steeped in hospitality, corporate governance, and international engagement. With over sixteen years of leadership experience at Rotana Hotel Management Corporation PJSC, where she serves as Corporate Vice President for Owner Relationship Management, she brings a strong understanding of both destination strategy and private-sector dynamics.

She also chairs the Abu Dhabi Chamber's Tourism Working Group and sits on the boards of the Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Council and Les Roches Hospitality Academy. This blend of operational insight and strategic governance establishes her as a leader grounded in execution as well as vision.

Her Statement of Intent, shared with member states at the outset of her candidacy, outlined four central priorities that will shape her leadership: sustainability, digital transformation, empowerment of youth and women, and stronger public-private collaboration. She positioned tourism not merely as an economic driver, but as an engine for inclusive development and cultural understanding. In this vision, UN Tourism is not just a platform for dialogue but

a catalyst for measurable impact. She has consistently emphasised that the next phase of tourism leadership must be defined by action, innovation, and accountability.

Following her nomination by the Executive Council in May, Shaikha Al Nowais thanked member states for their trust and promised to deliver on the vision she outlined during her campaign. "We want to deliver our promises – that's what I'm here to do," she said. "We had amazing meetings, we listened a lot, and now we're ready to act".

### Key Pillars: Sustainability and Innovation

One of the strongest elements of her agenda is sustainability – not as an abstract principle, but as a structural imperative. Al Nowais has spoken about tourism's responsibility in addressing climate risks, promoting regenerative practices, and protecting cultural heritage. She has noted that destinations must shift from volume to value, encouraging longer stays, deeper engagement, and responsible visitation. Her approach aligns with the global momentum towards green investment and net-zero strategies, signalling that UN Tourism under her leadership will intensify its advocacy on environmental stewardship.

Digital transformation is another pillar of her leadership vision. She has underscored the need for tourism to embrace emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, data analytics, and digital infrastructure. This aligns with UN Tourism's increasing focus on AI, showcased through initiatives such as global innovation forums and the forthcoming Riyadh Declaration on AI in Tourism. Al Nowais is expected to champion digital upskilling, smart destination frameworks, and innovation ecosystems that allow start-ups and SMEs to participate more equitably in the global tourism economy.

### Empowerment and Global Outreach

Al Nowais has pledged to work closely with African nations, especially in the areas of infrastructure investment, tourism skills development, and capacity building for SMEs. Her background in regional tourism development is expected to inform targeted programmes

for Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in eco-tourism and sustainable destination marketing. Observers believe that her election could open doors to stronger Gulf-Africa partnerships, with the UAE potentially expanding its footprint in African tourism projects. The extent to which her administration delivers on inclusive development, however, will be closely watched by tourism stakeholders across the continent.

Al Nowais has also consistently highlighted empowerment as a strategic priority—particularly for youth and women. As the first female Secretary-General, she embodies the possibility of leadership for future generations. Throughout her campaign, she stressed that tourism must foster meaningful opportunities and open clear pathways for women in leadership and enterprise.

As she prepares to take office, observers say her tenure will be expected to build on the reforms initiated by Pololikashvili, while introducing new energy and focus. Her historic win not only symbolises a shift in leadership, but also reflects growing expectations for a more inclusive, collaborative, and forward-looking global tourism agenda.

"Shaikha Al Nowais's extensive experience in hospitality and her commitment to sustainability, digital equity, and inclusive governance align seamlessly with our shared vision for a resilient and forward-thinking tourism sector. We look forward to collaborating closely with her to drive this vision," noted Julia Simpson, World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC) President & CEO.

**“As Secretary General Elect of UN Tourism, my commitment is to ensure that investment in the sector becomes investment in intention. That the next decade of tourism is defined not by numbers of arrivals but the quality of impact we create. - Shaikha Al Nowais at 16th UNCTAD**

”

Much anticipation surrounds the expected appointment of Shaikha Al Nowais as the new Secretary-General of UN Tourism. With over sixteen years in the hospitality and investment sectors, Al Nowais brings a wealth of experience from both private enterprise and public policy. She is widely recognised for her work in sustainability, gender empowerment, and innovation across the Middle East.

Her leadership is expected to prioritise inclusivity, digital transformation, and equitable growth, building on the work of outgoing Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, whose tenure has been defined by a push for greater innovation, rural development, and global visibility for the organisation.

The Riyadh Assembly will therefore not only mark a transition of leadership but also a recalibration of UN Tourism's mission – towards a more tech-savvy, inclusive, and sustainability-driven future.



Shaikha Al Nowais addressing the 123rd Executive Council Meeting in Segovia, Spain





## UN Tourism urges G20 Ministers to strengthen collaboration and promote Inclusive Tourism

The UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili has stressed that “strengthening multilateralism through tourism will deliver results in socio-economic inclusion, sustainable development, peace and understanding”.

Addressing G20 Tourism Ministers, he commended the South African Presidency's focus on inclusion and sustainability. “More than a motto, the theme for South Africa's G20 Presidency “Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability”, reminds us that Equality

and Sustainability can only be achieved through targeted policies, unified efforts and mutual support among countries - a recognition that in an interconnected world, the challenges faced by one country can have ripple effects globally,” he said.

The G20 Tourism Ministers Meeting focused on the four priorities of South Africa's Presidency:

Enhancing Travel and Tourism Startups and MSMEs through Digital Innovations

- Tourism Financing and Investment to enhance equality and sustainable development.
- Air Connectivity for Seamless Travel
- Enhanced resilience for inclusive, sustainable tourism development

As international tourism continues to growth – international tourist arrivals increased 5% in the first half of 2025 according to the latest World Tourism Barometer – Pololikashvili reaffirmed the critical importance of progressing digital transformation, financing for development, investment and resilient ecosystems in tourism, stressing that there will be no resilience without sustainability.

He called for supporting innovation and stressed that emerging technologies can transform tourism MSMEs, which are the backbone of tourism, but only with adequate financing and programmes to close the digital divide and promote inclusion.

### Tourism vital for developing countries

Focusing on financing for development, he noted that though “for many developing countries, including Least



UN Tourism SG, Zurab Pololikashvili addressing the gathering

Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States, tourism is a major source of employment, foreign exchange and tax revenues. Yet, the sector continues to be overlooked as a tool for development, with the total Official Development Assistance disbursements for tourism remaining below 0.11% of total ODA.”

Closing, Pololikashvili highlighted South Africa's G20 Presidency as a show of the continent's leadership in the global agenda. He recalled that Africa is home to 19% of the world's population, with 70% of sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 30. “The opportunities the continent offers in tourism are many” he said and “unlocking tourism investment and development for jobs and inclusion is a core priority of the UN Tourism Agenda for Africa.”

### UN Tourism as Knowledge Partner of South Africa G20 Presidency.

The G20 economies represent around 70% of all international tourist arrivals and exports worldwide and 83% of the world's tourism's global GDP. The sector accounted directly for 3.1% of the GDP of the G20 (2023), 5% of all exports of the group and 23% of all its service exports (2024).



South Africa's Tourism Minister, Patricia de Lille





# UN Tourism Celebrates World Tourism Day 2025 in Melaka, Malaysia



UN Tourism celebrated World Tourism Day 2025 in the historic city of Melaka, Malaysia, under the theme “Tourism and Sustainable Transformation.” This global Day of Recognition for the sector and its vital importance marked a pivotal moment in advancing tourism as a catalyst for positive change, resilience, and sustainable development worldwide.

The celebrations, hosted with the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture of Malaysia, brought together global leaders, policymakers, industry experts, and local communities to share innovative ideas and chart a sustainable future for the tourism sector. The celebrations aligned with the 7th edition of the World Tourism Conference (WTC), showcasing Malaysia's rich cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes, and commitment to sustainable tourism.

## A Global Call for Sustainable Action

This year's theme, “Tourism and Sustainable Transformation,” underscored tourism's potential to drive social progress, economic growth, and environmental stewardship. The event highlighted the need for good governance, strategic planning, and inclusive policies to ensure tourism

benefits all while preserving cultural and natural heritage. Malaysia's Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture, H.E. Dato Sri Tiong King Sing, welcomed participants from around the world to Melaka at the opening of World Tourism Day 2025 and the 7th World Tourism Conference

In his official message, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized, “Tourism is a powerful driver of transformation. It creates jobs, fuels local economies, and builds bridges across cultures. Yet, it must be sustainable to protect the very places and communities it celebrates. Let's harness tourism as a force for resilience, sustainability, and shared progress.”

UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili added, “World Tourism Day 2025 in Melaka has shown the world that tourism can be a force for good when guided by sustainability and inclusivity. By working together, we can transform tourism into a tool for empowerment, cultural preservation, and environmental protection.”

By working together, we can transform tourism into a tool for empowerment, cultural preservation, and environmental protection

## Highlights of World Tourism Day 2025

Affirming this commitment, the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, The Right Honourable Dato' Sri Haji Fadillah bin Yusof, on behalf of the Prime Minister of Malaysia, today officiated the opening of World Tourism Day 2025 and the 7th World Tourism Conference in Melaka.

Highlighting tourism's role as a unifying force, the Deputy Prime Minister stressed that growth must be inclusive and resilient, underpinned by sustainability, innovation, and global cooperation. He outlined Malaysia's initiatives – from expanding high-value tourism segments and digital nomad hubs, to investments in sustainable aviation fuel and community-led ecotourism – as examples of balancing economic progress with social and environmental responsibility. He also announced that Malaysia will join the UN Tourism International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO) with a pilot project in Mersing, Johor.

The celebrations in Melaka featured a series of activities, including high-level panel discussions and cultural showcases focused on sustainable tourism



practices and innovative strategies geared towards the resilience of the tourism industry. The focus was placed on building sustainable transformation through:

- **Investing in Education and Skills:** Programmes to empower women, youth, and marginalized communities through tourism-related training and employment opportunities.
- **Supporting Local Economies:** Promoting micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises to ensure tourism benefits reach local communities.
- **Accelerating innovation and digital transformation:** Identifying tourism game-changers, including
- **Cultural Exchange:** Showcasing Malaysia's vibrant heritage through

entrepreneurs, innovators and start-ups and supporting them to transform ideas into action and scale-up. Investing in digital education and closing the 'digital gap' through empowering rural communities, youth and post-conflict societies.

performances, culinary experiences, and exhibitions, reinforcing tourism's role in preserving traditions.

## World Tourism Conference 2025: A Framework for Collaboration

Held in the framework of World Tourism Day, the 7th edition of the World Tourism Conference (WTC) in Melaka served as a platform for fostering stronger bonds and innovative ideas for the global tourism industry.

The conference brought together stakeholders to discuss strategies for sustainable tourism development, focusing on resilience, inclusivity, and environmental stewardship. Key sessions explored topics such as digital transformation in tourism, community-based tourism models, and climate-neutral travel solutions, aligning with the theme “Tourism and Sustainable Transformation.”

## Looking Ahead

To conclude the official celebrations, Malaysia handed over the hosting of World Tourism Day to El Salvador. World Tourism Day 2026, will be held around the theme of “Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence to redesign tourism” and address the role of tourism in embracing digital transformation and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI).





# DR. KHALED EL-ENANY

## elected UNESCO Director-General

Egypt's former Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Dr. Khaled El-Enany, has been elected as the new Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), succeeding France's Audrey Azoulay after securing a majority of votes in the organization's Executive Board elections in Paris today, Monday, October 6, 2025, coinciding with the 52nd Anniversary of the Glorious October War Victory.

El-Enany won 55 votes against just two for his closest rival, Firmin Edouard Matoko of the Republic of Congo, the largest winning margin in UNESCO's history.

His victory marks a historic moment as El-Enany becomes the first Arab and only the second African to lead the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization since its establishment in 1945.

During his acceptance speech, El-Enany said: "I have visited 65 countries in 30 months and one day. I have conducted an inclusive campaign engaging all member countries."

He added "During my first 100 days, I promise to work with all member states to modernize UNESCO, without discrimination or personal agenda."

### About the elections

The elections for the position of Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for the period 2025-2029 will begin on Monday, October 6, 2025. The elections are witnessing fierce competition between Egyptian candidates Dr. Khaled El-Enany, former Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, and Congolese Firmin Edouard Matoko, UNESCO's Deputy Director-General for Africa and External Relations.

These elections are of great importance, as they determine who will lead this specialized UN agency, founded in 1945 and headquartered in Paris. Its mission is to promote shared human values by strengthening education, science, and culture, setting standards and tools, and developing knowledge to find solutions



to some of the greatest challenges of our time. UNESCO also supports a world of greater equality and peace. UNESCO works with its 194 Member States on a range of issues, including protecting biodiversity, addressing artificial intelligence, promoting quality education, preserving human heritage, and ensuring access to reliable information.

All eyes are on who will succeed Frenchwoman Audrey Azoulay, who has served two terms as president of this organization since 2017. Azoulay's primary goal is to contribute to peace and security by enhancing cooperation among countries in the fields of education and culture.

Two strong candidates are vying for this high-profile position: Congolese Firmin Edouard Matoko and Egyptian Khaled El-Enany. These elections are of utmost importance to Egypt, which is strongly supporting its candidate for the prestigious position. Previous Egyptian candidates include Ambassador Moushira Khattab in 2017, Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni in 2009, and former Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Ismail Serageldin in 2001.

### Egypt's intensive efforts to support Dr. El-Enany

Egypt has intensified its efforts to garner support for Dr. El-Enany, both

regionally and internationally, since the announcement of his candidacy. In April 2023, Prime Minister Dr. Mostafa Madbouly announced the Council's endorsement of Dr. Khaled El-Enany, former Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, for the position of Director-General of UNESCO for the period 2025 to 2029, as Egypt's candidate.

The League of Arab States adopted a summit-level resolution in May 2024 supporting and endorsing Dr. El-Enany's candidacy as the only Arab candidate for the position. This marks the first time a candidate has received such broad Arab consensus. This reflects the aspirations of Arab countries for an effective role within the international organization and the importance of Arab leadership for UNESCO in the coming period.

Al-Anani also received the African Union's endorsement in February 2024, July 2024, and July 2025, which confirms the official African alignment behind the Egyptian candidacy in appreciation of Al-Anani's competence and ability and a reflection of the African continent's confidence in Egypt to achieve the common aspirations of African countries.

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Migration, and Egyptian Expatriates Badr Abdelatty met on Sunday, 5th September, 2025, with the permanent representatives of Turkey, Brazil, Bangladesh, Japan, Qatar, Saudi



UN Tourism Secretary General Zurab Pololikashvili congratulating Dr Khaled El Enany who also served as Egypt's Minister of Tourism and Antiquities

Arabia, Luxembourg, and the UAE to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

This meeting took place during his visit to Paris as part of the intensive efforts made to support Dr. Khaled El-Enany, Egypt's candidate in the elections for the Director-General position, and to garner support from various countries.

Khaled Ahmed El-Enany Ali Ezz, born in 1971, is a leading figure recognized for his expertise and commitment across diverse fields including teaching, scientific research, culture, tourism, management, public service, and international relations. A former Egyptian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, he currently holds the

position of Professor of Egyptology at Helwan University, where he has been a faculty member for over thirty years. His teaching, focused on the civilization, archaeology, and epigraphy of Ancient Egypt, is not only taught in Egypt but also at prestigious international institutions. As a mentor, he has enabled thousands of students and researchers, both Egyptian and international, to benefit from his in-depth knowledge and vast experience. Through his conferences and scientific engagements across twenty countries, he has shared his expertise, enriched academic discourse and encouraged access to knowledge, while promoting intercultural dialogue. His proficiency in Arabic, French, and English demonstrates his communication skills, a key asset for

fostering international cooperation.

President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi congratulated Dr. Khaled El-Enany on the occasion of his landslide victory in the elections of the Executive Board of the UNESCO and his election as Director-General of the Organization

I wish to extend my sincere congratulations to Dr. Khaled El-Enany on the occasion of his landslide victory in the elections of the Executive Board of the UNESCO and his election as Director-General of the Organization, in which he garnered an overwhelming support of 55 votes out of a total of 57; a historic achievement that shall be added to Egypt's diplomatic and cultural record and to the achievements of the Arab and African peoples.

This well-deserved triumph embodies Egypt's standing as a great civilization, reaffirms the capability of its sons and daughters to play leading roles in international forums, and reflects the world's confidence in Egypt's competent professionals that combine knowledge, expertise, and devotion.

I wish all the best to Dr. El-Enany in his noble mission. I am confident that he will contribute to promoting cultural dialogue and protecting human heritage in a manner that is worthy of Egypt's great civilization and all the great civilizations of humanity.

## UN Tourism to Open 'Tourism Law Observatory' in the Middle East

The World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) is set to establish a Tourism Law Observatory for the Middle East. This pioneering initiative will support the development and harmonization of legal and regulatory frameworks for tourism across the region.

### Strengthening Legal Frameworks for Tourism

The Tourism Law Observatory for the Middle East will serve as a knowledge hub and digital platform that systematically collects, organizes, analyses, updates and disseminates tourism-related laws and regulations in the region, with the support of a network of individual experts and academic collaborators. It will also issue publications, recommendations, and organize conferences and seminars on topics of special interest.

The initiative aligns with the broader mandate of UN Tourism's Tourism Law Observatories, a flagship initiative endorsed by the 25th General Assembly. These Observatories represent a long-term, large-scale initiative led by UN Tourism to be developed across its five different regions, with a view to fostering the progressive harmonization of Tourism Law at the international level, thus enhancing legal security and benefiting all tourism operators.

### Key Objectives

As the first of its kind in the region, the Tourism Law Observatory represents a milestone for UN Tourism, reflecting its commitment to support Member States of the Middle East in addressing key challenges and complexities of tourism legislation. Key objectives will include:

Development and Improvement of Legal Frameworks: To optimize legal and regulatory frameworks applicable to tourism, encouraging progressive regulatory harmonization in areas requiring supranational intervention.

Fostering Regional Regulatory Cooperation: To foster effective communication among all tourism stakeholders, by providing a platform for regional dialogue and allowing countries to share experiences, learn from each other, and collectively address common challenges.

Optimization of Governance Models: To optimize governance models of the tourism sector, by promoting the active participation of various stakeholders throughout the regulatory process.



## Ghana's Ambassador to Spain, H.E. Regina Appiah-Sam, shares her vision for a new era of tourism diplomacy

In an era where diplomacy increasingly intersects with development and culture, Ghana's new Ambassador to Spain and Permanent Representative to UN Tourism, H.E. Mrs. Regina Appiah-Sam, embodies a new generation of Ghanaian leadership on the global stage. With over two decades of experience in the Foreign Service, her career reflects a steadfast dedication to advancing Ghana's values of peace, dialogue and opportunity.

As Ghana continues to cement its reputation as a gateway to Africa—renowned for its rich heritage, stable democracy and warm hospitality—Ambassador Appiah-Sam stands at a crucial juncture in strengthening the nation's diplomatic, economic and tourism footprints abroad. In this exclusive interview with VoyagesAfriq, she speaks about her journey in diplomacy, her vision for Ghana-Spain relations and how she plans to leverage Ghana's position on UN Tourism's Executive Council to drive sustainable growth, investment and visibility for the country's tourism sector.



H.E. Regina Appiah-Sam presented her credentials as Ghana's Permanent Representative to UN Tourism to Secretary General Zurab Pololikashvili

With clarity of purpose and a passion for inclusive development, Ambassador Appiah-Sam also reflects on the growing role of tourism in Ghana's foreign policy, the power of cultural diplomacy and offers an inspiring message to young women aspiring to leadership in public service.

**1) How did your journey in Ghana's diplomatic service begin, and what**

**inspired you to pursue this path?**

I joined Ghana's Foreign Service in 2002 with a simple conviction: diplomacy is public service with a global footprint. I was inspired by the example of dedicated Ghanaian diplomats who used dialogue, fairness, and cultural understanding to open doors for our country. Over the years, I have served across regions and portfolios such as bilateral, multilateral,



Ghana's Ambassador to Spain and Permanent Representative to UN Tourism, H.E. Mrs. Regina Appiah-Sam



The Ambassador presenting her letters of credence to the King of Spain His Majesty Felipe VI

**“Lead with purpose, protect your integrity and say “yes” to hard assignments—excellence compounds. Remember that leadership is service, there will be setbacks, but do not relent. And to young women: your voice is needed at the table. Take your seat with confidence, do the work with humility, and bring others along.”**

**leverage this to boost Ghana's tourism sector?**

Our seat is a platform to turn ideas into outcomes. I will prioritize:

- Capacity building – securing internship programs, officers on loan and scholarships for public officials, women and youth of Ghana.
- Sustainable growth—accessing UN Tourism tools for green transitions, standards, and community impact.

political, and economic. The privilege of representing Ghana's values and promoting her interest continues to motivate me every day.

**2) If you were to highlight Ghana's unique appeal, what experiences or qualities would you emphasize to the world?**

Ghana is the gateway to Africa and the center of the world. Ghana hosts the Secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area, which is the secretariat of the 1.3 billion Africa market. The growing youthful population offers a great labour force for businesses hoping to make use of local manpower. Visitors find a 24hr economy, welcoming people, a stable democracy, rule of law, raw materials and a rich tapestry of culture—from historic coastal castles and vibrant festivals to contemporary music, art, and cuisine. Ghana offers ease, safety, and that unmistakable Ghanaian sense of belonging—Akwaaba.

**3) Ghana sits on UN Tourism's Executive Council. How will you**

- Skills and competitiveness—technical assistance for MSMEs, data and statistics, and targeted capacity-building.

- Connectivity and facilitation—advocacy on air links, travel facilitation, and seamless visitor experiences.

- Investment and partnerships—curating bankable projects and matchmaking with global operators.

- Visibility—hosting/participating in flagship events and campaigns that spotlight Ghana's offerings. Working closely with the Ghana Tourism Authority and private sector, we will align these gains with jobs, exports, and regional value chains.

**4) To what extent does tourism feature in Ghana's foreign policy, and how is it used for development and diplomacy?**

Tourism is a strategic pillar of Ghana's economic diplomacy. The government

of Ghana in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts launched the following flagship projects to strengthen diaspora engagements and boost her economy: Year of Return, Beyond the Return, December in Ghana, Destination Ghana and the Black Star Experience. Ghana believes that, tourism deepens people-to-people ties, strengthens diaspora engagement, and supports youth and women's employment. In short, tourism is both a bridge of cultures and a catalyst for inclusive growth.

**5) What message would you share with young people—especially young women—seeking leadership roles in diplomacy or public service?**

Lead with purpose, protect your integrity and say “yes” to hard assignments—excellence compounds. Remember that leadership is service, there will be setbacks, but do not relent. And to young women: your voice is needed at the table. Take your seat with confidence, do the work with humility, and bring others along.

**6) As Ghana's Ambassador to Spain, what are your top priorities for diplomacy, trade, tourism, and bilateral relations?**

My focus is to:

- Deepen political dialogue and multilateral cooperation.

- Grow trade and investment in priority sectors—renewables, agribusiness, manufacturing value-addition, and creative industries.

- Boost tourism flows through stronger connectivity, promotion, and joint campaigns.

- Advance education and skills partnerships, research, and innovation links.

- Manage migration cooperatively, including circular migration that protects rights and builds skills.

- Deliver strong consular services and engage our vibrant diaspora as partners in development. These priorities are anchored in practical projects, private-sector collaboration, and results that improve lives in Ghana and enrich Ghana-Spain relations.





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DESTINATION NEWS

## Dr George Partridge appointed Malawi's new Minister of Industrialisation, Business, Trade and Tourism

President Arthur Peter Mutharika has appointed Dr. George Partridge as the new Minister of Industrialisation, Business, Trade and Tourism, marking another major step in his ongoing drive to streamline government and strengthen economic management through the inclusion of experienced private sector leaders.



boards of Malawi Airlines and Sunbird Tourism Plc and played advisory roles on several national development and economic committees.

By bringing such a figure into government, President Mutharika appears intent on bridging the often-cited divide between policy formulation and private sector execution. The lean government initiative — one of the President's key governance reforms — seeks to reduce the size and cost of the public administration while aligning ministries along practical and outcome-oriented lines. The consolidation of industrialisation, trade, business, and tourism under a single portfolio reflects an ambition to accelerate economic transformation and make policy delivery more coherent.

Dr. Partridge will be expected to spearhead policies that drive industrial growth, enhance trade competitiveness,



stimulate private investment and revitalise tourism — a sector with vast but underutilised potential. His long career at the intersection of finance, enterprise and governance positions him to lead efforts to create a more enabling environment for business, improve Malawi's export base and expand value addition in local production, while positioning the Southern African country as the 'Warm Heart of Africa.'

The appointment, announced in a statement from the Office of the President and Cabinet on Thursday, takes immediate effect. It is part of a broader restructuring agenda that merges several key economic portfolios into one powerful ministry designed to improve coordination, cut bureaucracy and promote efficiency. The new ministry now brings together functions that were previously handled separately by the ministries responsible for industry, trade, business development and tourism — all central pillars of Malawi's growth agenda.

Dr. Partridge served as Chief Executive Officer of the National Bank of Malawi from 2006 to 2016, before being elevated to Group Chief Executive of Press Corporation Limited, Malawi's largest conglomerate with holdings in banking, telecommunications, energy and manufacturing. Prior to his career in commercial banking, he spent over a decade with the Reserve Bank of Malawi, where he rose to the position of Director. Over the years, he has also chaired the





# South Africa unveils R1 billion tourism investment projects

South Africa has rolled out eight flagship, investment-ready tourism projects worth nearly R1 billion (One billion Rands) at the inaugural G20 Tourism Investment Summit, signalling its readiness to attract global capital and unlock the sector's full potential.

Delivering the official opening address on Wednesday, 10th September, Minister of Tourism Patricia de Lille told delegates that the projects, spanning both public and private sectors, were designed to offer strong returns for investors while uplifting communities.

Among the headline ventures is the God's Window Skywalk in Mpumalanga, seeking R200 million (\$10.4 million), and the Hole in the Wall Resort in the Eastern Cape, which requires R141 million (\$7.9 million). Together with six other projects, they represent a portfolio of opportunities aimed at enhancing South Africa's tourism infrastructure, diversifying attractions, and driving inclusive growth.

"These are bankable projects with high impact, but they are just the beginning," Minister de Lille said. "Our national pipeline is rich, diverse, and growing. We are not only a nation of immense tourism potential but also a gateway to Africa."



Patricia de Lille, Minister of Tourism - South Africa



UN Tourism SG, Zurab Pololikashvili handover the Tourism Doing Business SA to Patricia de Lille

**“Our national pipeline is rich, diverse, and growing. We are not only a nation of immense tourism potential but also a gateway to Africa.”**

## Policy shifts unlock growth

De Lille highlighted that recent regulatory reforms had paved the way for innovative financing. Since June 2025, amendments to National Treasury Regulation 16 for Public-Private

Partnerships have allowed for more flexible investment models, including blended finance, crowdfunding, and Design-Build-Operate arrangements.

"This creates a fertile environment for shovel-ready projects," she explained. "With the right mix, we can build infrastructure, create jobs, and uplift communities all at once."

## Tourism as a growth engine

Tourism already contributes at least 8.5% to South Africa's GDP, with July 2025 alone recording over 880,000 international arrivals – a 26% increase year-on-year. According to UN Tourism, South African tourism startups attracted more than \$39 million in venture capital between 2019 and 2024, representing more than half of Africa's total.

To further boost investor confidence, the Summit also saw the launch of the "Tourism Doing Business: Investing in South Africa Guidelines", developed in collaboration with UN Tourism. The guidelines aim to provide clarity, transparency, and certainty for potential investors.

## Private sector confidence growing

The Minister pointed to major private sector commitments as evidence of investor confidence, including the V&A Waterfront's R20 billion Granger Bay precinct development in Cape Town and

Club Med's new resort on KwaZulu-Natal's Indian Ocean coastline.

"These pioneers are proof that South Africa is ready, open, and serious about investment," de Lille noted.

## Youth and skills at the centre

With 56% of South Africans under the age of 30 and an adult literacy

rate of 95%, de Lille emphasised that human capital was one of the country's strongest assets. She welcomed UN Tourism's announcement of 100 scholarships aligned with demand-led skills development, ensuring the tourism sector is equipped with the workforce of the future.

## Opening doors for global visitors

South Africa is also moving to improve travel access. The Department of Home Affairs will roll out an Electronic Travel Authorisation system before the end of September, streamlining visa processes for tourists from around the world.

Positioning South Africa as a sports tourism destination is also on the agenda, with bids and hosting rights secured for events ranging from Formula 1 at Kyalami and the LIV Golf tournament at Steyn City to the 2027 ICC Cricket World Cup.

Minister de Lille concluded with a direct call to investors:



"Every rand or dollar invested here means jobs for young South Africans. Every partnership formed will help us transform tourism into a driver of inclusive, sustainable prosperity. South Africa is a nation at work, and we are about action. Partner with us, and together we can deliver a bold new chapter in tourism investment."





## Angola to Showcase Tourism Potential as Host Country of ITB Berlin 2026



An international stage for a hidden gem: Angola's Ministry of Tourism and ITB Berlin today officially announced their partnership for 2026. The country located in southwest Africa is the host country of ITB Berlin, which will celebrate its sixtieth anniversary on the Berlin Exhibition Grounds from 3 to 5 March 2026. At an official event today the Tourism Ministry of the Republic of Angola and Messe Berlin, the organiser of ITB Berlin, signed a partnership agreement. The signatories were Márcio de Jesus Lopes Daniel, Minister of Tourism of the Republic of Angola, and Dirk Hoffmann, COO of Messe Berlin.

"We are delighted that Angola is the official host country of ITB Berlin 2026. This partnership offers a unique opportunity to showcase the country's diversity, culture and natural beauty on one of the world's most important platforms", said Márcio de Jesus Lopes Daniel, Minister of Tourism of the Republic of Angola. "With our new brand identity 'Visit Angola – The Rhythm of Life' we want to show how vibrant, diverse and authentic our tourism products are and invite the international travel industry to experience the rhythm of Angola with all their senses."

"With its new brand identity and slogan 'The Rhythm of Life', Angola is sending a strong signal on the international

tourism stage. It is a special honour for us to welcome this multifaceted country as the official host country for the sixtieth anniversary of ITB Berlin", said Dirk Hoffmann, COO of Messe Berlin. "The partnership once again highlights ITB Berlin's role as a platform that supports destinations in making their tourism potential visible on the world stage."

"It is a great pleasure and honour to present Angola as the host country on the major tourism platform that is ITB Berlin," said Julia Kleber, CEO of the Kleber Group and official representative of the Angola Tourism Board. "Angola inspires with its fascinating contrast of wild coasts, impressive desert landscapes, majestic

**“With its new brand identity and slogan ‘The Rhythm of Life’, Angola is sending a strong signal on the international tourism stage. It is a special honour for us to welcome this multifaceted country as the official host country for the sixtieth anniversary of ITB Berlin”, said Dirk Hoffmann, COO of Messe Berlin. “The partnership once again highlights ITB Berlin’s role as a platform that supports destinations in making their tourism potential visible on the world stage.”**

waterfalls and ancient rock formations. Our country embodies the spirit of The Rhythm of Life – full of energy, diversity and warmth. We are proud to represent Angola as the official Tourism Board and to raise its profile as a new, authentic destination in international tourism."

### Host country Angola at ITB Berlin 2026

With its pristine national parks, spectacular waterfalls, never-ending deserts and beaches that stretch for miles, Angola is still one of Africa's largely unexplored travel destinations. Its cultural diversity, rich culinary traditions and lively music and dance scene make the country an exceptional destination for travellers.

As the official host country, Angola will present a wide-ranging programme at ITBBerlin from 3 to 5 March 2026. This will kick off with the opening gala on 2 March at the CityCube Berlin, where the southwest African country will officially open ITBBerlin.

In 2026 ITB Berlin is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary. Since its launch in 1966 it has grown into the World's Leading Travel Trade Show. Today, the international brand portfolio includes not only the leading trade show in Berlin, but also ITBAsia, ITB China, ITB India and, from 2026, ITB Americas. The anniversary brings together the past, present and future of travel.



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## Seychelles Nature Trail Showcases Sporting Prowess, Cultural Richness, and Sustainable Tourism



Mrs Sherin Francis

The second edition of the Seychelles Nature Trail 2025 concluded successfully, drawing 169 runners who braved the challenging 22-kilometre route through the scenic Morne Seychellois National Park. Designed to highlight the archipelago's natural heritage and promote sustainable tourism, the second edition of this eco-tourism signature event combined endurance, conservation, and cultural celebration.

At the end of a day marked by grit and resilience, three champions emerged:

- Nasir Wiqar Ahmad (Pakistan) – First Place
- Zaman Umar (Pakistan) – Second Place
- Quatre Jonathan (Seychelles) – Third Place

Speaking after his victory, gold medalist Nasir Wiqar Ahmad reflected on the experience: *"I really enjoyed the race, the weather, the trail conditions were so beautiful... The volunteers were very good and I look forward to coming back to Seychelles."*

The 22 km course, with an ascent of 1,210 meters, tested runners' endurance across some of Mahé's most diverse terrain. Starting from Port Glaud, participants navigated coastal views at Cap Ternay, forest-lined paths at Anse Major, steep ascents at Mare aux Cochons and Cassedent, and rolling tracks through Tomassin before reaching the finish line at Grand Anse Mahé.

This year's trail also welcomed a diverse mix of participants, including families and military personnel who took on the challenge together. Among them were Seychellois runners Arthur Anglade and his mother Carole Anglade, who travelled from France to share the experience with her son. Reflecting on their motivation, Arthur said: *"The objective was for my mom to come and do the trail with me, so we could spend time together. For her, it was the first time, and although she trains in France, this was very tough. For me, it was my second time, and doing it with her made it special."*



Adding to the electric atmosphere, local artistes delivered thrilling performances at the Grand Anse, the event's finishing line. Their music infused authentic Seychellois rhythms into the celebration, leaving patrons swaying to island vibes as they cheered on the participants.

The 169 participants represented 16 countries, underscoring the event's growing international recognition. The race featured expanded categories, with acknowledgements made not only to the winners but also to young participants,



Bernadette Willemin DG of Destination Marketing of Tourism Seychelles with elderly Seychellois women who showcased the Creole cuisines

older athletes, and those who embodied the true spirit of endurance by simply completing the challenge.

In keeping with Seychelles' Sustainable Tourism Strategy, the trail placed strong emphasis on eco-friendly practices. Hydration points were designed with minimal environmental impact, waste separation was implemented along the course, and community-driven conservation messages were integrated throughout.

At the finish line, the Creole fair at Grand Anse Mahé brought together local vendors, cultural showcases, and conservation partners, turning the race into a community festival. Senior women of the community prepared traditional Creole food, adding a warm, authentic flavor to the celebrations, while volunteers and partners ensured a vibrant atmosphere that reflected Seychelles' cultural richness.

Speaking at the closing ceremony, the Principal Secretary for the Tourism Department, Sherin Francis, commended the participants and partners who made the event possible. She said: *"This event has strengthened our resolve to continue promoting sports tourism while safeguarding the natural beauty and cultural richness of our islands. To all participants, whether you finished first or last, your presence and spirit have left footprints not only along the trails of Mahé but also in the hearts of everyone who has witnessed your journey."*



She further acknowledged the role of partners such as the National Sports Council of Seychelles and the Seychelles Parks and Gardens Authority, highlighting their contribution to community development and conservation. Francis added: *"Today we celebrate not only those who crossed the finish line but also the shared values this event represents, nature, wellness, and sustainability. Each of the 22 kilometers of this trail has revealed what is truly special about Seychelles."*

The Seychelles Nature Trail continues to serve as a platform for diversifying Seychelles' tourism offerings beyond its renowned beaches, reinforcing the country's position as a leader in eco-conscious and experience-driven travel. By engaging schools, local tourism operators, and small businesses, the event delivered both immediate economic benefits and long-term opportunities for sustainable growth.

The Seychelles Nature Trail 2025 once again reaffirmed the islands' unique ability to blend sporting excellence with environmental stewardship and cultural pride. For participants, it was a day of endurance and achievement. For Seychelles, it was a reminder that the future of its tourism lies in protecting and showcasing the very landscapes that make the destination extraordinary.

As the event closed with its prize-giving ceremony, the message was clear: the Nature Trail is more than a race, it is a statement of Seychelles' vision for tourism that benefits both people and planet.

### 2026 Edition announced

The 3rd edition of the event has been fixed for May 16.





## Cabo Verde places nature Tourism at the centre of National Strategy

Cabo Verde has reaffirmed its commitment to repositioning tourism as a driver of inclusive and sustainable development, placing rural and nature tourism at the heart of its national strategy. Speaking at the 3rd International Conference on Rural and Nature Tourism, held on the island of Santiago, the country's Minister of Tourism and Transport, Dr. José Luís Sá Nogueira, underscored the importance of decentralizing tourism beyond the traditional sun-and-sea model.

"This third edition, after the remarkable success of São Antão in 2023 and São Nicolau in 2024, reaffirms the Government's commitment to the territorial decentralization of tourism," Dr. Sá Nogueira declared. "We are bringing to islands with low incidence in the Sun and Beach segment a form of tourism closer to communities, one that produces direct impact, always with the backdrop of job creation and higher income, while valuing and preserving both material and immaterial assets."

Dr. Sá Nogueira highlighted the Operational Tourism Program (POT 2022-2026) as the guiding instrument for implementation. Under this framework, the government has mobilized approximately 4.7 million contos for investments dedicated to rural and nature tourism across Santiago, Santo Antão, São Nicolau, Fogo, and Brava.

"Since the start of POT's implementation in 2022, more than 1.5 million contos have already been executed in the nature tourism segment by the first half of this year," Dr. Sá Nogueira confirmed. The allocations target projects such as accessibility, port infrastructure, and urban requalification — foundational enablers to support sustainable product development.

The Santiago conference, aligned with the global celebration of World Tourism Day on September 27, assembled government officials, private operators, development partners, and international guests. Its programme featured interactive sessions designed to share best practices and explore the operational realities of developing rural and nature-based tourism.

Among the themes addressed were the process of tourism development on Santiago, sustainability and heritage



**Dr. José Luís Sá Nogueira, Minister of Tourism and Transport**

within a circular economy framework, tourism in protected areas, the design of routes, and adventure tourism through hiking trails.

"These discussions are not theoretical," Dr. Sá Nogueira stressed. "They are about aligning conservation with livelihood creation, ensuring that our natural and cultural resources generate value for communities while remaining preserved for future generations."

Acknowledging the structural barriers that have long constrained mobility across the archipelago, Dr. Sá Nogueira emphasized aviation as a crucial component of the country's tourism strategy. He drew attention to the establishment of Linhas Aéreas de Cabo Verde, a new domestic airline created with a public service obligation to guarantee inter-island connectivity.

"Against all the difficulties inherent to the aviation industry, aggravated by the impact of Covid-19, the Government launched a new company specifically to respond to the growing demand of tourism and our Diaspora," he said. "With the arrival of the first two ATR aircraft, we begin a new phase in mobility, a factor crucial to the development of the national economy and in the fight against regional asymmetries."



**Dr. Olavo Avelino Garcia Correia, Vice Prime Minister**

The conference agenda was deliberately aligned with the 2025 World Tourism Day theme: Transformation and Sustainability of Tourism. Dr. Sá Nogueira reminded participants that the sector offers opportunities not just for economic growth but also for climate action and building resilience.

"The tourism sector provides opportunities for balanced, inclusive, and people-centered development," he noted. "It allows us to accelerate climate action and provide greater sustainability to the planet, fully aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals."

For investors and operators, Cape Verde's message was clear: the framework is in place, resources are mobilized, and connectivity is being secured. For policymakers and community leaders, the challenge is to ensure that the promised benefits reach local populations, particularly on islands less dependent on traditional beach tourism.

The conference on Santiago, Dr. Sá Nogueira concluded, "represents the highlight of a vast programme that not only celebrates World Tourism Day but also advances our vision of positioning Cape Verde as a global destination for sustainable, inclusive, and diversified tourism."



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## Ghana Launches December in GH 2025 with Renewed Focus

Ghana's end-of-year cultural calendar received its official launch as the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), in partnership with the Black Star Experience and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts, unveiled December in GH 2025 at the Banquet Hall of Jubilee House. Convened under the patronage of the Office of the President and opened by Chief of Staff Julius Debrah, the event underscored a renewed commitment to culture-led tourism as a driver of economic activity, domestic engagement, and international diplomacy.

The launch brought together senior government officials and leaders from the creative sector, including the Senior Presidential Advisor on Government Affairs Dr Valerie Sawyerr, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Creative Arts Madam Abba Dzifa Gomashie, Black Star Experience Coordinator Rexford Owusu Marfo, Pan-African Festival Chair Prof Esi Sutherland, and GTA board members Samuel Seth Passah and Afi Amoro. Their attendance highlighted the event's national importance and the collaborative approach guiding the 2025 programme.

December in GH 2025 will run from 1 December and feature one hundred activities across all sixteen regions. The calendar has been curated to reflect Ghana's cultural diversity, encompassing music, theatre, gastronomy, fashion, community service, and business forums.

Key highlights include the Matriarch's Verse Experience, SHE Rhythms Festival, the African Food Festival, Ghana Food Festival, the Made in Ghana Fair, Ayewa Festival, a mid-December Diaspora Summit, and the AfroFuture Festival grand finale at El Wak Sports Stadium on 28 December, followed by a New Year's Eve celebration at Labadi Beach Hotel.

The GTA described December in GH as a platform for cultural diplomacy, private-sector growth, and diaspora engagement. Last year's edition attracted more than 200,000 international visitors, reinforcing its role as a major contributor to Ghana's creative and events economy.

GTA CEO Maame Efua Houadjeto framed the initiative as both cultural and economic in purpose, describing it as "a cultural movement, an economic driver, and a creative footprint that continues to shape Ghana's global identity." She outlined the 2025 priorities as innovation, inclusivity, and impact, and emphasized collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to enhance travel accessibility and visa facilitation.

Minister Abba Dzifa Gomashie reaffirmed the government's agenda to expand the creative economy and deepen tourism's contribution to national growth. She called on the private sector to drive event delivery, training, and entrepreneurial development to ensure that benefits

flow directly into local communities.

Chief of Staff Julius Debrah urged a renewed focus on service excellence, domestic tourism, and Ghana's reputation for hospitality, emphasizing that "service is the currency of our hospitality" and calling on the GTA to ensure every visitor experience reflects the nation's welcoming spirit.



Julius Debrah, Ghana's Chief of Staff



Dzifa Gomashie, Minister of Tourism

Organizers stressed the critical role of private-sector collaboration in achieving measurable outcomes, with partnerships spanning hotels, airlines, event organizers, and small businesses. The Diaspora Summit, scheduled for 19-20 December at the Accra International Conference Centre and Palms Convention Centre, will facilitate trade and investment discussions between diaspora communities and local enterprises.

Community participation and environmental sustainability were also

emphasized, with the GTA committing to employment creation, capacity building, and responsible event management across regions.

Now a cornerstone of Ghana's tourism strategy, December in GH continues to serve as a flagship initiative for diaspora engagement and experiential travel. With strong political backing, private-sector participation, and a comprehensive calendar, the 2025 edition positions Ghana as a dynamic cultural hub, advancing tourism, economic growth, and national unity.

## Angola's new Tourism brand - 'VISIT ANGOLA: THE RHYTHM OF LIFE'

Angola has formally launched Visit Angola, The Rhythm of Life, a national tourism brand designed to reposition the country on the international travel map by foregrounding culture, hospitality and the diversity of visitor experiences.

The launch ceremony in Luanda brought together a wide spectrum of national and international stakeholders, including the President of the Constitutional Court, ministers from multiple portfolios, representatives of justice bodies, accredited ambassadors, local administration officials, tour operators, trade associations, and invited guests. The occasion was framed as a pivotal step in uniting Angola behind a common vision for tourism-led development.

Inspired by Angolan rhythms and the country's cultural mosaic, the brand introduces several key instruments to drive its presence. These include an official website with detailed destination information and booking services, the

Visit Angolamagazine available in print and digital formats, a musical album, two tracks of which were presented at the launch and a 24-hour tourist support hotline to provide information and assistance to visitors.

The event also unveiled the initiative's founding partners: ENSA, Pumangol, Viva Seguros, Sonangol EP, TAAG and Banco Sol. A roster of high-profile brand ambassadors was announced, among them Leila Lopes, Jessi Madalena, DJ Djef, Jessé Manuel, Nadir Tati and Chef Helt Araújo, all tasked with amplifying Angola's tourism message both locally and abroad.

In his keynote, Minister of Tourism Márcio Daniel positioned the brand as the beginning of "a collective journey to reposition Angola on the international tourist map." He explained that the new identity reflects the country's 50-year vision, embodying the tenacity and strength of its people and drawing inspiration from national icons and sporting achievements, including Angola's recent Afrobasket triumph. He described Visit Angola as the "maximum expression of national pride," representing a country that is not only culturally vibrant and naturally endowed, but also deeply authentic in its everyday life.

Highlighting this authenticity, he invoked the expression that there is an Angola beyond "bread-bread, the cheese-



Márcio Daniel

cheese," symbolizing the simplicity and warmth of Angolan hospitality. He underlined that the mission is not only to highlight destinations, but also "to offer unique human experiences," while calling on all Angolans to embrace the brand as an exercise in national unity. Sustainable tourism, he added, is essential to reduce dependence on oil and to build a diversified and resilient economy.

For Angola's tourism sector, the launch of Visit Angola, The Rhythm of Life represents both vision and action. With its tools for visitor engagement, strategic partnerships, and cultural ambassadors, the initiative seeks to convert awareness into meaningful visitor experiences and broader economic impact.





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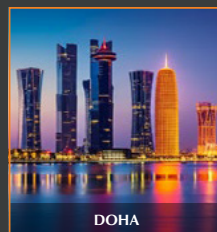
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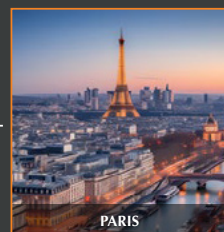
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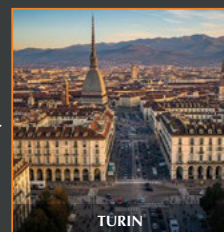
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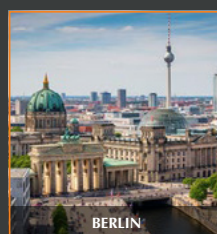


TURIN

## ITB BERLIN

03 - 05 March 2026

Germany



BERLIN

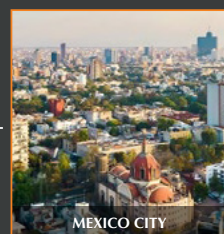
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23 - 27 March 2026

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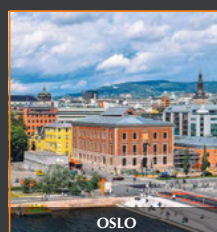


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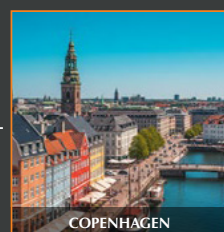
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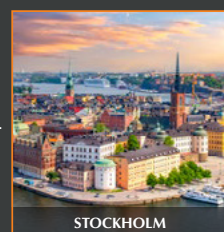
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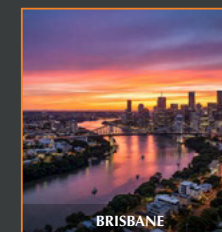


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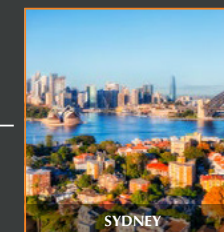
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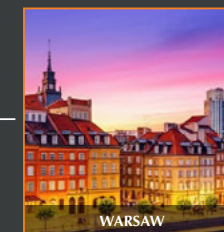
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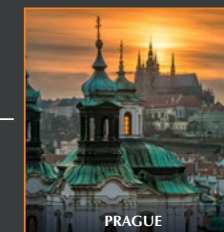
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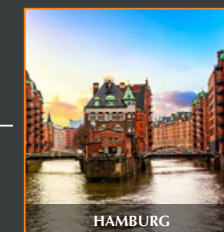
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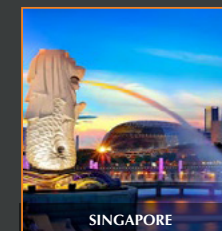


HAMBURG

## ITB ASIA

21 - 23 October 2026

Singapore



SINGAPORE

## ITB AMERICAS

10 - 12 November 2026

Mexico

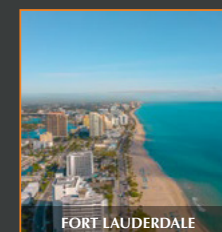


GUADALAJARA

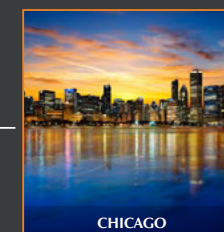
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## Eko Tourism Foundation Sets Out to Position Lagos as Africa's Tourism Hub

The Eko Tourism Foundation (ETF) has been formally established to coordinate, promote and commercialize Lagos's tourism assets, with an explicit mandate to position the city as a leading destination for visitors to Africa. Launched in late September 2025 under the auspices of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission, the Foundation brings together private sector leadership and cultural custodians to drive investment, skills development and global marketing for "Destination Lagos" and, by extension, "Destination Nigeria."

The Foundation's governance structure is led by Alhaji Lai Mohammed as Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Governing Board. Gabriel Idahosa, President of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry, is recognised as the founding father of the initiative. The Board of Trustees includes figures drawn from culture, hospitality, business and the arts, among them HRH Erelu Abiola Dosunmu, Chief (Dr.) Nike Okundaye, Prince (Dr.) Yemisi Shyllon, Mr. Karl Hala, Dr. Iyadunni Gbadebo and Dr. Tunde Lawrenson.

ETF has been created to serve as an inclusive forum linking government and private-sector stakeholders across the tourism value chain. Its core functions are policy advocacy, coordinated industry representation, global marketing of Lagos as a visitor destination, and the mobilization of investment for tourism infrastructure and services. The

Foundation is intended to act as a single, organized voice for the sector, and to offer partnership channels for international tour operators and investors.

The Foundation's launch referenced the scale of Nigeria's tourism and creative industries, which support an estimated 10 to 15 million jobs and accounted for approximately 3.6 percent of national GDP in 2022, equivalent to about US\$17.3 billion. Lagos's hospitality footprint was highlighted as a strategic asset, with over 2,000 hotels and roughly 70,000 rooms serving a diverse market that includes business travelers, leisure visitors and event attendees. Projections cited by ETF planners refer to expected sector growth of 5.4 percent annually from 2023 to 2030, with potential to create millions of new jobs and add further revenue to the economy.

ETF's vision declares an ambition to become a pro-Lagos, world-class foundation for socioeconomic development through infrastructure, technology, capacity development, advocacy and landmark investments. Its mission is to "bring the world to Lagos and indeed, to Nigeria," through focused marketing and strategic partnerships.

To operationalize that mission, ETF has identified a suite of flagship initiatives, including an Eko Tourism Foundation Trust Fund to mobilize capital, an ETF Academy for human capital development, an annual international conference and



exhibition, the Experience Lagos Project featuring immersive and virtual tours, and a quarterly ETF publication to disseminate industry data and insights. Additional planned instruments include an ETF mobile app, student-focused ETF Club, festival programming, merchandising, a loyalty and rewards scheme, and an awards programme to recognize industry promoters.

Membership of ETF is structured to encompass the full tourism ecosystem: government agencies, hotels, restaurants, agro-allied firms, tour operators, training and research institutions, construction and real estate firms, creative and entertainment industries, fashion, galleries and museums, financial



institutions, technology companies, airlines and other relevant sectors. Membership categories range from Grand Patron and Chancellor to Champions, Ambassadors, Custodians, Pillars and Industry Heroes.

ETF has outlined benefit packages intended to support members through reliable data updates, B2B networking platforms, market access services, advocacy for business-friendly policies, loyalty-card discounts, training

## Meta launches four-month tourism upskill programme for Sub-Saharan Africa

Meta has unveiled a dedicated four-month Tourism Upskill programme for Sub-Saharan Africa, a series of monthly online trainings aimed squarely at government ministries, tourism boards and institutional stakeholders across the region.

The programme — running from September to December 2025 — will deliver four 2-hour online sessions (one per month) beginning 29 September 2025. Each session is tailored to practical, tourism-specific uses of Meta's family of platforms, with a focus on helping public and quasi-public tourism institutions modernise their digital approach and raise the competitiveness of their destinations.

Session themes have been designed around core digital priorities for the sector and include:

- Organic best practices for audience building and content that converts
- Brand advertising and creative diversification to reach new markets
- Performance optimisation and measurement to demonstrate ROI

opportunities, investor introductions and inclusion in national and international events.

ETF has prioritized skills development through the proposed ETF Academy and quarterly training programs, and data-driven decision making via regular surveys and industry research to produce market intelligence for members and partners. The Foundation intends to drive public-private partnership ventures for infrastructure, curate cluster projects to help members pool resources, and run global partnership drives to promote Lagos internationally.

At its public unveil, ETF's leadership called on Lagos business owners, cultural practitioners, regulators, investors and professionals across related sectors to participate through membership, partnerships, volunteering or financial support. The Foundation has invited stakeholders to engage with its pilot initiatives, and to contribute to the development of a coordinated strategy for tourism-led economic growth.

- Tourism use cases on Meta platforms to translate strategy into action

Meta says the initiative is intended to help participants "upskill and reskill" teams responsible for marketing, product development and stakeholder engagement — equipping them to use digital tools to attract visitors, measure impact and develop more effective campaigns.

Judith Mongala, Head, Government and Social Impact Partners, Sub-Saharan Africa at Meta, underlined the programme's strategic aim: "Empowering Sub-Saharan Africa's tourism sector through digital transformation is crucial for economic growth. Join the Tourism Upskill Program and discover how Meta technologies can boost your industry, from digital capacity training to innovative solutions, and unlock new opportunities for tourism ecosystem stakeholders across the region."

Organisers say the four-part format is intentionally compact and practical: short, monthly two-hour modules that allow busy officials and boards to participate

“*ETF's vision declares an ambition to become a pro-Lagos, world-class foundation for socioeconomic development through infrastructure, technology, capacity development, advocacy and landmark investments. Its mission is to “bring the world to Lagos and indeed, to Nigeria,” through focused marketing and strategic partnerships.*”

The Eko Tourism Foundation represents an institutional effort to centralize and scale Lagos's tourism potential through advocacy, skills development, investment mobilization and global marketing. Additional operational details, membership registration criteria and programme timetables are expected to be published by the Foundation as its initial projects move into implementation.



without long absences from office, while providing time between sessions for participants to apply learnings and bring real questions back to subsequent meetings.

Registration is open now. Interested ministries, tourism boards and institutions can secure their place at: <https://events.atmeta.com/tourismssa>

As destinations across Sub-Saharan Africa compete for a growing and more digitally savvy traveller, the programme offers a timely opportunity for public-sector stakeholders to refresh their digital toolkits and sharpen how they promote place, measure success and collaborate with private-sector partners.





## O'Leleshwa Retreat Opens in Naivasha Offering Contemporary Boutique Hospitality with a Community Focus

Naivasha, O'Leleshwa Retreat, a boutique property located in the Great Rift Valley, will officially open on 1 November 2025. Managed by Lodgistics Professional Hospitality Solutions and represented in sales by Poised Solutions, the Retreat brings together a small-villa model, on-site culinary sourcing and community-linked skills development as part of its operating framework.

The property comprises three private villas designed to balance privacy with shared living spaces. O'Lorien Villa offers three en suite bedrooms with a shared lounge and kitchenette, O'Leleshwa Villa provides four en suite bedrooms with a shared lounge and kitchenette, and O'Lerai Villa includes two en suite bedrooms with a shared lounge and kitchenette. The configuration is intended to accommodate exclusive villa stays, family getaways and small group retreats.

Culinary programming will emphasise fresh, seasonal produce, drawing on ingredients grown on the property and sourced from local suppliers. Wellness and leisure facilities include a swimming pool and outdoor lounges, and a programme

of therapies such as massages, yoga and meditation. Guided activities on offer include nature walks, horseback riding, birdwatching and sundowner picnics. Curated excursions will connect guests to nearby destinations including Hell's Gate National Park, Soysambu Conservancy, Lake Naivasha, Lake Nakuru National Park, Mount Longonot and Eburru Forest.

From the outset, the development process incorporated local participation. Community members contributed to construction and received training in building skills, teamwork and site operations. Looking ahead, O'Leleshwa Retreat plans to continue supporting vocational initiatives in hospitality and property management in partnership with Lodgistics, with an emphasis on skills development and professional training.

The Retreat's positioning targets both regional and international leisure markets, noting demand from high-value travellers across the USA, Europe and neighbouring African countries. With its location approximately one hour's drive from Nairobi, the property aims to complement Kenya's established safari circuit by

offering a tranquil base for exploration of Naivasha and the surrounding Rift Valley.

Neil Steedman, commenting on the partnership, said, "Our partnership with Lodgistics and Poised Solutions reflects a shared belief in hospitality that balances excellence with responsibility. O'Leleshwa Retreat is about creating a memorable guest experience while contributing positively to the people and communities around us."

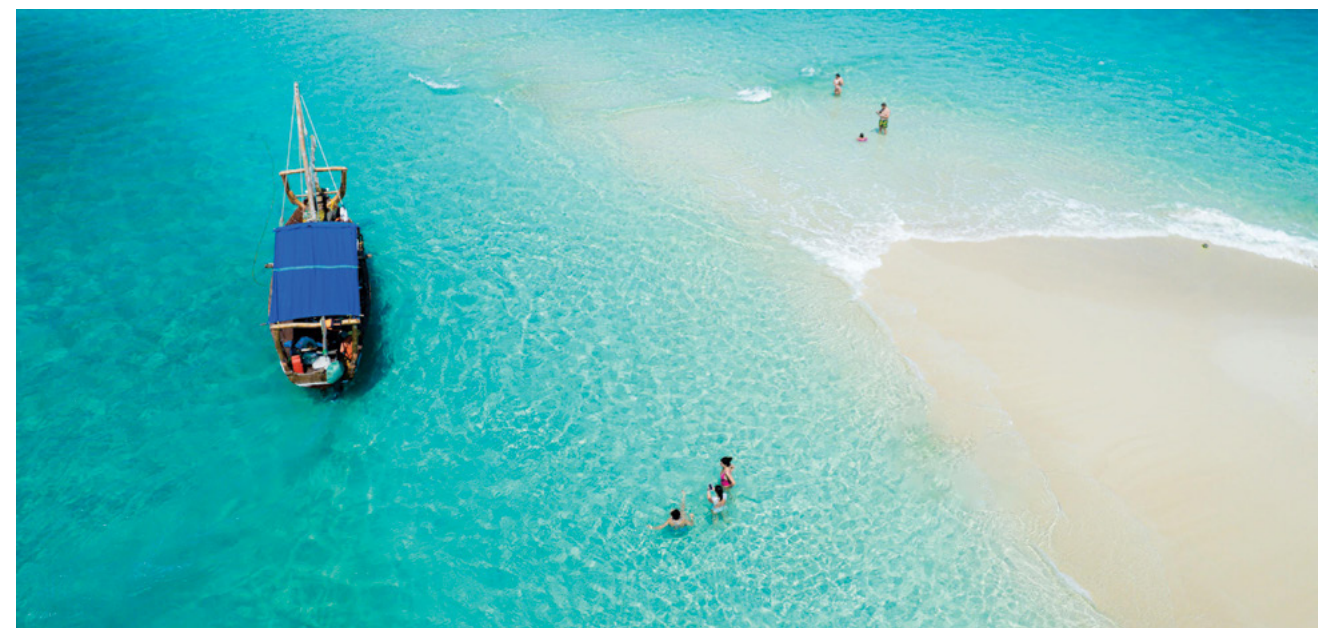
Sustainability features include the use of locally sourced materials, handcrafted décor and partnerships with nearby farmers and artisans. The Retreat also intends to support community programmes that preserve cultural heritage and provide economic opportunity for adjacent communities.

Bookings will open ahead of the official launch and will include options for exclusive villa stays, family packages and small-group reservations. The property is offering special opening rates for stays between 1 November 2025 and 31 January 2026.

## The Barefoot Luxury Experience in Zanzibar



Luxzan is a premier Destination Management Company (DMC) based in Zanzibar, delivering high-end, tailor-made experiences for leisure and business travelers alike. Specializing in Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events (MICE), Luxzan blends local insight with global service standards to create unforgettable moments for our clients.



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# AFRICA'S MICE MOMENT: A Sector Poised for Transformation

By Linda Pereira

After four decades in the global MICE industry, I've seen firsthand how meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions can shape entire economies—when done right. And I can tell you with certainty: Africa is at a pivotal moment. The continent is beginning to realise that MICE isn't just a niche add-on to leisure tourism, it's a powerful lever for investment, job creation, knowledge transfer, and long-term economic transformation.

In 2023, Africa's MICE sector was valued at around US\$16.6 billion, with forecasts predicting rapid growth to nearly US\$65.6 billion by 2032. That's an extraordinary compound annual growth rate of over 16%. It tells us one thing very clearly: the potential is real, and the momentum is building.

Some countries are already leading the charge. South Africa remains the continent's most mature MICE destination, and for good reason. It has the infrastructure, the international connectivity, the professional experience, and a broad economic base that supports and sustains the sector. Rwanda, in particular, has been a standout in recent years. With a purpose-built convention centre, a proactive convention bureau, government support, and strong safety and accessibility credentials, Kigali has become one of Africa's go-to destinations for association meetings.

Others are making commendable progress. Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Zambia are actively developing national strategies, investing in venues, improving their policy environments, and looking at MICE through a broader economic lens. But in many parts of the continent, the sector remains fragmented, under-resourced, and lacking the coordination and institutional muscle to really take off.

And that's a missed opportunity. Because MICE is about far more than bringing in visitors and filling up hotel rooms. When it's done well, it has a multiplier



effect, rippling out through investment, jobs, education, and even diplomacy. Let me break that down.

MICE is about global connections, local impact. When a major international conference or trade show lands in an African city, it brings with it decision-makers, investors, NGOs, tech innovators, and multinationals. These events become more than networking platforms, they're gateways to inward investment, joint ventures, export opportunities, and regional integration, especially under frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

MICE is also about jobs and economic spillovers. It is a labour-intensive sector, with demand stretching across hospitality, logistics, security, technology, transport, marketing, catering, and more. Crucially, it also supports a wide range of small businesses, from

florists and entertainers to artisans and translators. For many cities, it can provide a reliable year-round economic boost that smooths out the seasonality of leisure tourism.

Here's where I believe the deepest impact lies. MICE builds human capital. To host successful events, you need skilled professionals in everything from event planning to AV tech to sustainability. And as countries invest in this sector, they inevitably invest in skills development, educational reform, institutional strengthening, and service excellence. MICE becomes not just a revenue generator but a catalyst for human capacity building.

However In Africa I see glimmers of progress... and gaps that need closing. There are promising signs. Zambia, for example, has conducted a comprehensive national study titled "Harnessing MICE for Tourism Sector

Growth", a critical step in identifying gaps and mapping the way forward. Ethiopia has established a national convention bureau and is integrating MICE into broader tourism and economic planning. South Africa, already a leader, continues to refine its competitive edge through investment in marketing, visa reform, and infrastructure.

Moreover, we now have clearer insights into what's working, and what's not, thanks to research such as the African Perspectives on the MICE Industry 2024/25 report. It benchmarks national strategies, assesses the maturity of convention bureaus, flags institutional gaps, and stresses the importance of diversifying source markets, especially by growing intra-African MICE traffic.

But the challenges remain, and they're significant. Many countries still lack a coherent national MICE strategy. Even when strategies do exist, they often suffer from underfunding, lack of continuity (as government administrations change), or weak implementation capacity. Too many venues remain underutilized because supporting infrastructure, flights, transport, visas, digital access, are just not up to par.

There's also an overreliance on traditional markets in Europe and North America. That makes the sector highly vulnerable to global disruptions, be it pandemics, geopolitical tensions, or economic slowdowns. Meanwhile, intra-African demand remains a largely untapped opportunity.

And let's not forget education and training. In too many countries, we still lack dedicated programmes in event management, technical production, sustainability, and service excellence. The result? Even where infrastructure exists, it's often underused or poorly maintained, not due to lack of will, but lack of skills.

Here's something I feel strongly about: Africa must not try to replicate the MICE models of Europe, Asia, or North America wholesale.

I've worked on projects in Dubai, Singapore, and Frankfurt and while these cities are remarkable in their own right, their models are rooted in very specific political, financial, and infrastructural contexts. What works in Singapore may

be unfeasible, or even harmful, if applied uncritically to, say, Accra or Lusaka.

Instead, African countries must craft locally grounded strategies—ones that respect their cultural assets, environmental realities, cost structures, and human capital. African destinations offer something deeply unique: authenticity. Cultural heritage, natural beauty, community stories, and creative industries can and should be embedded into the MICE offering. Sterile convention centres and generic packages won't stand out. Locally-rooted experiences will.

And let's not forget sustainability. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and community livelihoods are not peripheral issues in Africa—they're central. MICE development must be environmentally sound, socially inclusive, and economically equitable. Otherwise, we risk short-term wins at the expense of long-term damage.

What Must Happen Next? I identify seven urgent Priorities. To truly harness the transformative power of MICE, African governments and their partners in education and business need to act decisively. Here's where I believe the focus should be:

Develop Coherent National MICE Strategies. With long-term vision, cross-ministry alignment (tourism, trade, transport, education), and resilience beyond political cycles.

Strengthen Convention Bureaus. Build capable, professional teams with real budgets, authority, and autonomy. These aren't just marketing bodies, they're ecosystem enablers.

Invest in Holistic Infrastructure. Not just buildings, but air connectivity, local transport, visa systems, digital infrastructure, safety standards, and service quality.

Create Tailored Education & Training Programmes. Through universities, technical colleges, and private partnerships. Event management, hospitality, conferencing tech, project management, all need attention.

Focus on Local Strengths and Intra-African Markets. African countries must learn to market to each other. And they

must build MICE offerings rooted in their own culture, nature, and history, not someone else's blueprint.

Build Data and Evaluation Systems. Collect and analyse real data, on attendance, spend, outcomes, infrastructure use. Benchmark performance. Use it to improve and attract investment.

Embed Sustainability and Social Inclusion. Ensure the sector delivers jobs for youth and women, supports local SMEs, and treads lightly on the environment. This isn't a luxury, it's a necessity.

After 40 years in this industry, I can say with confidence that MICE has the potential to be one of Africa's strongest levers for development. It brings global visibility, builds institutions, develops skills, and creates livelihoods that touch all levels of society.

But that will only happen if we stop treating MICE as an afterthought, and start treating it as a strategic pillar of economic policy, education planning, and international engagement.

Africa doesn't need to copy the world. It needs to lead with its own story. With vision, professionalism, and commitment, MICE can be a driver not just of economic activity, but of progress, pride, and purpose.

Let's get to work.

“ **MICE is about global connections, local impact. When a major international conference or trade show lands in an African city, it brings with it decision-makers, investors, NGOs, tech innovators, and multinationals. These events become more than networking platforms, they're gateways to inward investment, joint ventures, export opportunities, and regional integration, especially under frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** ”



## TIFA Underscores an Ecosystem Approach to Tourism Investment in Africa



Miller Matola, CEO Millvest Advisory

The Tourism Investment Forum Africa (TIFA) 2025 concluded in Richards Bay, South Africa, with a clear message: sustainable tourism growth in Africa hinges on an ecosystem approach that integrates multiple sectors and fosters investment readiness across regions.

Milvest Advisory CEO, Miller Matola, described the three-day forum as a success, highlighting the strong participation, quality content, and collaborative programming developed with the City of uMhlatuze. The event combined insightful discussions with curated site visits designed to connect investors directly with local opportunities.

TIFA's structure is deliberately designed as "a global platform for local action," promoting development in secondary and tertiary cities where investable opportunities often go unnoticed. Host destinations are selected based on the

range and maturity of their project pipelines, extending beyond tourism into industries that underpin it, energy, logistics, and infrastructure.

Since its inception, TIFA has identified more than 50 projects across Southern Africa, with several government-led energy initiatives now progressing toward procurement. However, tourism-related projects have faced slower traction due to bankability constraints and limited access to information. To bridge these gaps, Matola outlined three key measures: ensuring Milvest's participation in project agreements to understand deliverables, proactively tracking progress with municipalities and project owners, and initiating early vetting and distribution of project data to investors.

TIFA's emphasis on bankable, market-ready projects remains central, but the platform will also continue showcasing high-potential initiatives requiring feasibility support. This dual approach ensures investors can engage both with projects ready for capital mobilization and those requiring developmental partnerships.

A defining feature of TIFA's model is its ecosystem view of tourism investment. The forum brings together diverse role-players, development banks, municipalities, and private investors, recognizing that tourism cannot thrive without enabling infrastructure. Institutions such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) exemplify this synergy, financing essential

infrastructure like roads and utilities that make hospitality projects viable.

This year's edition also introduced the SME Zone, a new feature aimed at ensuring that global investment conversations yield local economic benefits. The zone connected small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with financiers, development institutions, and larger corporations, fostering dialogue on market access, capital acquisition, and innovation. The engagement opened supply-chain linkages and highlighted pathways for SME integration into broader tourism development.

Looking ahead, TIFA plans to maintain momentum throughout the year with virtual sessions focused on capacity building, project tracking, and investor engagement. These activities aim to ensure continuous dialogue, sustained accountability, and the acceleration of projects in the investment pipeline.

TIFA 2025 in Richards Bay reaffirmed a disciplined framework for tourism-led development across Africa's emerging cities. By prioritizing early project preparation, transparent partnerships, consistent follow-up, and support for SMEs, the forum continues to evolve as a vital catalyst for investment and inclusive economic growth.

The event's outcomes reflect a pragmatic vision: tourism development in Africa must be intentional, collaborative, and ecosystem-driven, anchored by strong local partnerships and a commitment to transforming opportunities into sustainable results.






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# Essence of Africa 2025 showcases the power and potential of African tourism in Malindi

The coastal town of Malindi, Kenya, came alive from October 7–9, 2025, as the Essence of Africa 2025 forum brought together 150 pre-qualified international buyers and 150 African exhibitors from over 40 countries for three days of dynamic business meetings, market insights and strategic discussions. Hosted at the Diamonds Malindi Beach Resort, the event has cemented its place as Africa's leading international buyer forum, connecting the continent's tourism industry to global opportunities while charting a new course for intra-African collaboration.

Essence of Africa 2025 opened with an energetic call for transformation, delivered by Riaan Manser, the celebrated explorer who cycled 36,500 kilometres around the African continent. Addressing an audience of industry leaders, destination managers and tour operators, Manser challenged delegates to move beyond empty promises and embrace tangible collaboration.

"There's an ocean between saying and doing," he said to resounding applause. "Think bigger, act braver and build genuine connections. It's not about the deals you make — it's about the relationships you build that will still be there in five years' time."

Manser's message struck a chord with participants, many of whom have long called for a shift from talk to concrete action within Africa's tourism sector. His words set the tone for an event defined by collaboration, innovation, and solution-driven dialogue.

## The Americas market: Opportunities and adjustments

Day One continued with a deep dive into the Americas Market Buzz, moderated by Paula Newton of Rethink Travel Marketing. The panel, featuring Antoinette McKenzie (Explorations Africa), Erick Mwirigi (Travel World Safaris), Andrea Landaeta (Sariri Terra), and Ariadna Garduno Martinez (Experience Designer), provided vital insights into the evolving North and Latin American markets.



Key highlights included:

- **Longer Booking Windows:** Canadian travellers are now booking up to two years in advance, a major shift from the pre-pandemic six-month window. Experts urged African suppliers to introduce rate-protection schemes or early-booking discounts to capture this segment.
- **Evolving US Market:** Multi-generational travel is booming, with families taking three to four vacations annually. Authentic storytelling and a strong online presence are now essential to attract younger, research-driven American travellers.
- **Digital Detox Demand:** A surprising trend emerged around WiFi-free camps and digital detox experiences, as travellers seek authentic, distraction-free escapes.
- **Latin America's Growth:** Brazil and Mexico are fast becoming Africa's next major tourism frontiers. Brazilians are now exploring destinations such as

Botswana, Mozambique, and Uganda, looking for "luxury with purpose," while Mexican travellers are driven by conservation, cultural authenticity, and community engagement.

Panelists stressed the need to educate Latin American travellers about Africa's diversity, curating deeper, more meaningful itineraries instead of "see-it-all" trips across multiple countries in two weeks.

## Asia-Pacific insights: Sustainability and market sophistication

The Asia-Pacific Market Buzz, moderated by Leanne Haigh (Lemala), featured Lin Yu (Travel World China), Leanne Wild (The Africa Safari Co), and



Heena Munshaw (Beacon Holidays), who unpacked opportunities and challenges in the booming Asia-Pacific region.

- **India's Green Revolution:** Indian travellers are increasingly choosing sustainable travel, with 70% prioritising eco-friendly practices such as zero single-use plastics and farm-to-table dining. The post-COVID boom has also seen travellers taking multiple holidays each year, with flexible booking policies now crucial due to shorter lead times.
- **China's Digital Landscape:** Lin Yu underscored the importance of WeChat as the cornerstone of communication and marketing in China. "If you're not on WeChat, you're not talking to China," she said. Content must be localised and visual-heavy to succeed in this market.
- **Australia's Long-Haul Power:** Australians remain among the most valuable long-haul travellers, often combining multiple destinations such as Kenya, Victoria Falls, and Cape Town. Multi-generational trips are increasing, with many visitors returning for repeat experiences.

However, connectivity issues and limited direct flights were identified as barriers, while the success of e-visa systems in countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and South Africa was praised for driving bookings and easing access.

## Middle East and Africa markets: Growth fuelled by connection and reform

On Day Two, attention turned to the Africa and Middle East Market Buzz, moderated by Kojo Bentum-Williams, with speakers Sadiq Dindar (Tingana Hospitality Group), Tes Proos (Crystal Events & Incentives), Ifeoma Maureen Aneke (Allure Travels and Tours Limited), and Amos Wekesa (Great Lakes Collection).

Middle Eastern travellers, Dindar revealed, are among Africa's most valuable visitors, typically staying 15–20 days and spending between \$1,000 and \$1,500 per day. "Fifteen years ago, every conversation began with safety concerns — today, it's not even mentioned," he noted. Family and intergenerational



travel remain key, alongside growing interest in halal-friendly and women-only travel segments.

Corporate and incentive travel has also evolved post-COVID, with businesses now seeking immersive and meaningful experiences rather than luxury excess. "Pre-COVID incentives were about glitz and glamour," said Tes Proos. "Now, corporate groups want to engage with local communities and understand what makes destinations unique."

Nigerian travellers, despite facing travel clearance challenges, continue to be a strong source market. "Nigerians travel extensively and spend significantly," said Ifeoma Aneke. "They expect quality service and are willing to pay for it."

At the same time, intra-African tourism remains limited due to high airfares. "Flight costs within Africa are ridiculous," said Amos Wekesa bluntly. "We're sitting on massive potential but can't unlock it because of these barriers." He also noted that most African countries fail to market themselves to neighbouring nations, losing out on significant regional tourism opportunities.



## Policy wins: Visa reforms transforming access

Throughout the sessions, visa facilitation emerged as a decisive factor for growth. Speakers cited South Africa's removal of visa restrictions earlier this year and Kenya's simplified entry procedures — including the removal of arrival taxes — as key enablers of travel growth. Rwanda also earned praise for its progressive visa policies, which continue to bolster its reputation as a top destination for business and events.

The event concluded on a high note with the atmosphere in Malindi full of optimism and determination. The forum not only connected buyers and sellers but also served as a rallying point for African tourism professionals determined to shape a unified, competitive, and sustainable industry.

Essence of Africa 2025 succeeded in turning conversations into strategies, ideas into partnerships, and vision into momentum — proving once again that when Africa comes together, the world takes notice.



# TRIBE HOTELS GROUP

## IFEMA Madrid announces Mexico as Partner Country for FITUR 2026

The 46th edition of the International Tourism Fair will be held from January 21 to 25 at IFEMA MADRID.

Mexico's Secretary of Tourism, Josefina Rodríguez Zamora, announced a wide-ranging program to showcase before the global tourism market the richness, diversity, and potential of Mexico for international investment.

With the support of the Embassy of Mexico in Spain, the agenda of activities that Mexico will feature as Partner Country of FITUR 2026, the International Tourism Fair to be held from January 21 to 25 at IFEMA MADRID, has been unveiled. The announcement, hosted at the Residence of the Diplomatic Representation, was attended by Secretary of Tourism Josefina Rodríguez Zamora; Mexico's Ambassador to Spain, Quirino Ordaz; Coordinator of the Economic Development Advisory Council, Altagracia Gómez; President of ASETUR, Bernardo Cueto Riestra; and IFEMA MADRID's Executive Vice President, Daniel Martínez.

During the presentation, the Secretary of Tourism stated: "Being FITUR 2026 Partner Country represents a strategic opportunity to position Mexico as a global tourism powerhouse, highlight its cultural, natural, and gastronomic wealth, as well as present new routes and emerging destinations to sector professionals, investors, international media, and travelers."

### FITUR 2026, a key platform

Mexico's role as FITUR 2026 Partner Country comes at a time of growth for its tourism industry. From January to July 2025, international visitor revenues reached USD 21.682 billion, a 6.8% increase compared to the same period in 2024. The country also welcomed 27.7 million international tourists, 7.2% more than in 2024, while the total number of international visitors surpassed 55.8 million, up 13.5%.

These figures reflect Mexico's global appeal and inspire the country to leverage FITUR as a platform to boost visibility, attract new investment, and advance toward its goal of becoming the fifth most visited country in the world by 2030.



At the 46th edition of FITUR, Mexico will feature an innovative, immersive, and interactive space to showcase its tourism regions, Pueblos Mágicos (Magical Towns), and a diversified offering ranging from consolidated destinations—such as its 35 UNESCO World Heritage Sites or iconic celebrations like Día de Muertos and Veracruz Carnival—to hidden gems waiting to be discovered.

The fair will host presentations, cultural activities, and strategic meetings with key players in the global tourism industry. Priority projects in sustainability, infrastructure, and community development will also be promoted, along with meetings with the private sector and potential investors, reinforcing FITUR as a high-impact platform for the sector's growth.

Mexico's role as featured country coincides with a historic moment of international projection, as it will also host the 2026 FIFA World Cup. This unprecedented event will bring football and tourism together in a unique experience, inviting the world to discover far more than stadiums: cultural routes, vibrant gastronomy, crafts, design, and Mexico's renowned hospitality. FITUR 2026 will be the starting point of a narrative showcasing Mexico as a world-class destination and a gateway to unforgettable adventures.

"FITUR 2026 will be an exceptional window to showcase Mexico, with the largest pavilion in the Americas, highlighting our culture, traditions, and the greatness of our country. We will have the participation of 32 states, with gastronomic and artisan stands, cultural activations, and presentations that invite

tourists to live unique experiences. Today, Mexico offers community-based, MICE, health, romance, and sports tourism; unique segments that allow travelers to discover and truly experience our country," stated Rodríguez Zamora, Secretary of Tourism.

Meanwhile, Mexico's Ambassador to Spain, Quirino Ordaz, emphasized: "Mexico being FITUR 2026 Partner Country is a historic milestone that projects its presence not only in Spain but worldwide. This global showcase will strengthen commercial, community, and cooperation ties, and will open the door to greater tourism exchange and strategic investments that will benefit both sides of the Atlantic."

Through the Embassy of Mexico in Spain, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides institutional support and coordinates tourism promotion activities within the framework of FITUR, in line with the public and tourism diplomacy strategy driven by the Government of Mexico, to make the most of one of the sector's most important fairs with wide international reach.

Finally, Daniel Martínez, Executive Vice President of IFEMA MADRID, highlighted: "FITUR 2026 will be a historic edition with an unprecedented commitment to the generation, exchange, and dissemination of knowledge. It is an honor to have Mexico as Partner Country, as it stands as an example of a global tourism powerhouse through its commitment to destination transformation, support for local communities, innovation, and the promotion of biocultural heritage."


  
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## ICCA conducts CICE Training in Africa



The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), in collaboration with the Rwanda Convention Bureau and Rwanda Events Group, hosted the second cohort of its ICCASkills Programme. The focus of this session is the Certified International Convention Executive (CICE) certification—a globally recognized credential designed to elevate professional standards in the Business Events Industry. The training is taking place at the iconic Kigali Convention Centre, under the auspices of the Africa ICCASkills Hub.

This initiative reflects ICCA's strategic commitment to fostering knowledge exchange and developing human capital across Africa's rapidly growing Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector. By equipping professionals with advanced skills and

internationally recognized certification, ICCA is helping to position Africa as a competitive force in the global business events landscape.

The current cohort includes participants from eight African nations: Rwanda, Tanzania, Namibia, Ethiopia, South Africa, Zambia, Cameroon, and Kenya. This diverse representation underscores the continent's collaborative spirit and shared ambition to build a thriving, interconnected business events ecosystem.

Frank Murangwa, ICCA's Regional Director for Africa, commended the programme, emphasizing its role in shaping the future of the industry. "ICCASkills is a transformative initiative that not only empowers today's professionals but also nurtures the next generation of leaders in the Business

Events Industry," he said. "This cohort exemplifies an ecosystem driven by vision, leadership, and purpose—one that fosters career growth, builds legacy, and delivers long-term impact across the continent."

Dr. Senthil Gopinath, CEO of ICCA, expressed optimism about Africa's potential, noting that the continent's Business Events Industry continues to experience dynamic growth. This momentum is supported by expanding MICE infrastructure, a youthful and ambitious population, and visionary leadership in countries such as Rwanda, South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Namibia, Tanzania, and Senegal. With initiatives like ICCASkills, Africa is steadily emerging as a global hub for business events, professional development, and innovation.

## Shaping the industry's future at IBTM World's Forum for Advocacy

The agenda for IBTM World's Forum for Advocacy, taking place on the eve of IBTM World in Barcelona has been unveiled, with advancing the global event economy as the central theme.

Presented in partnership with The Business of Events, the Forum will gather a group of senior leaders, policymakers and influencers to the Hotel Miramar Barcelona on Monday 17th November to debate the most pressing questions facing the industry. There will be representatives from Canada, Iceland, Japan, New York, United Kingdom, Glasgow, Ireland and Estonia at this year's event.

Themes on the agenda include how to effectively work together to grow the global event economy, what policies could encourage policymakers to help unlock the potential of the industry, and finally, how to successfully advocate for the value of the events sector among politicians and policymakers.

This year's event builds on the success of the inaugural Forum for Advocacy which brought together 80 senior leaders and policymakers from around the world in 2024. The outcomes of the Forum's discussions will be presented on the Main Stage at IBTM World on Tuesday at 1.20pm.

Opening the forum will be IBTM World's Exhibition Director, Claudia Hall. Claudia comments: "The Forum for Advocacy is more than an event – it's a rallying call. It sits at the heart of IBTM World, ushering in each edition with a bold conversation about elevating the events sector's impact on society and economies alike. At IBTM, our theme is People. Power. Potential. – and the Forum embodies that belief fully. It is our shared platform to ignite possibilities, amplify voices, and chart a stronger, more empowered future for our industry. I am honoured to be part of this moment, to listen, to learn, and to bring the Forum's insights forward into IBTM World itself."

The IBTM World Forum for Advocacy



is supported by seven leading organisations including ICCA, PCMA, IAPCO, Events Industry Council, Joint Meetings Industry Council, City DNA and SANCBE.

Sherrif Karamat CAE, President and CEO, PCMA, comments: "Remember this date – Monday 17th November 2025. It is the second edition of the IBTM Forum for Advocacy in partnership with The Business of Events. Being a part of this Forum is much more than gaining valuable insights on the major issues of the day. It is where industry, government and community leaders intersect to influence policy makers on what is impacting our industry and why it should matter to them."

Martin Boyle, CEO, IAPCO, says: "Whilst it remains a key strategic pillar of IAPCO, our advocacy initiatives focus primarily on the value that an accredited PCO brings to clients and the value that IAPCO plays in raising the professionalism of our industry. It is of vital importance that leaders from across the many global meetings industry associations and organisations have appropriate opportunities to

share views, objectives and data so that, together, we can advocate the value of our diverse industry with a clear, unified message. The IBTM World Forum for Advocacy is a platform to support this."

Dr Senthil Gopinath, CEO, ICCA, adds: "I'm honoured to once again attend the IBTM Forum for Advocacy in Barcelona this year. IBTM isn't just another industry gathering, but a strategic moment for us to help shape policy, amplify the value of business events, and drive global change.

"I'm looking forward to helping to ensure that governments understand and support the full value chain of business events, not just venues, but associations, destinations, and suppliers. I'm dedicated to driving advocacy in business development and technology so our industry can thrive. And finally, I'm excited to join with fellow leaders to set a united agenda: where policy, investment, and strategic action follow the vision we share."

Following the Forum, guests will have an opportunity to continue informal talks at the Meetings Leadership Network Reception.



## Reducing Bottlenecks, Driving Growth: Inside Seychelles' One-Stop Investment Strategy



goals. "It's about diversifying the economy. That's one of the roles we do; promote investment into the country in a way that aligns with national priorities."

### A one-stop shop for investors

For investors, SIB is designed to ease entry into the market and reduce unnecessary hurdles. "When an investor comes in, we're basically a one-stop shop," Laljee said. "They come in, we will advise them, and we will scope their projects on their behalf with referral agencies, be it tourism, the Ministry of Health, and so on."

He acknowledged that bureaucracy can be frustrating, but stressed that the Board's facilitation role helps overcome that. "The idea is to reduce the bottleneck and the frustration that exists around the world. A lot is being done to speed up the ease of doing business. Without compromising regulations, we want to make the process seamless."

### Emerging sectors: from renewable energy to aquaculture

Seychelles' investment opportunities are not confined to tourism. Laljee outlined several areas that are "ripe and ready" for capital. "Renewable energy is a sector as a whole that is open for investment," he said. "As a small island state, it makes sense for us to tap into solar energy, into the natural energy that we have, and reduce our dependency on fossil fuels. We've got key targets to reach by 2030 and 2050, and we're on track."

Other promising areas include ICT, education, financial services, and aquaculture. "Aquaculture is a huge opportunity," Laljee said. "The sector is primed and it's ready. Regulations are in place, policies are in place, areas have been identified. We're really actively looking for investors to come in."

### Cruise tourism and cultural growth

Even within traditional sectors, Laljee pointed to untapped possibilities. Referring to Seychelles' cruise tourism, he said: "The tourist comes in on a cruise ship, it's like a day or

two. There's an opportunity for souvenirs, local crafts, culture, and food. People want to taste something different, they want to see and feel the country. As the sector develops, there is real space for auxiliary services to grow."

### Sustainable investment and balance

Laljee was clear that not all investment is welcomed unconditionally. "Obviously, the investors that come in be it new hotels or new guesthouses should have that sustainable aspect to it," he said. "That reduces their footprint, which is part of the SDG investor map we have."

The country's moratorium on new tourism establishments reflects this balance. "As a very small island, we need to make sure it's sustainable," Laljee explained. "We need to ensure that in terms of waste management, water, sewage, and road infrastructure, we can sustain the demand. It's a balancing act, but it's good."

### Aftercare and long-term vision

Beyond entry facilitation, SIB also plays a long-term role. "You come in, you launch a project, and obviously there's that follow-up as aftercare," Laljee said. "Are you facing any challenges in terms of construction, in terms of operation? If we need to facilitate meetings between inter-departments, we will do that. We won't let you fly solo."

Looking ahead, he highlighted SIB's vision: "It is to continue growing the economy, getting FDI coming in. One of our visions is to see a very nice spread: other sectors growing and maturing. Medium-term is to have regulations and policies in place so that we're primed and ready. Long-term, you'll see these investments growing, maturing, and contributing positively to the economy."

For Laljee, it all comes back to Seychelles' ambition to move beyond reliance on a single industry. "Diversification is key," he concluded. "It's about building resilience, attracting quality investment, and ensuring Seychelles remains competitive for generations to come."

### Diversification beyond sun and sand

Tourism remains Seychelles' leading sector, but Laljee was quick to highlight how its investment future is expanding. "The tourism board is doing a great job in marketing Seychelles as a destination," he noted. "But the appeal from tourism now is: let them spend more. We're leading the forefront to get diversification within the tourism sector; more cultural tourism, more sports tourism, for example beach soccer, and agro-tourism with the hiking trails."

This diversification, Laljee explained, ties in directly with broader government

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MICE



## 15<sup>th</sup> SITHO Expo Showcases Tourism as a Force for Sahelian Integration

The 15th edition of the International Tourism and Hospitality Fair of Ouagadougou (SITHO) held under the patronage of the Prime Minister, represented by State Minister of Agriculture, Animal and Fishery Resources, Commander Ismaël Sombié concluded this weekend during the world tourism day celebrations.

Over four days, stakeholders from across the region gathered to exchange ideas and celebrate cultural diversity under the theme: "Tourism and Integration of the Peoples of the Sahel."

The opening ceremony featured exciting artistic performances, traditional dances, and official addresses highlighting the importance of tourism and hospitality to economic growth and social cohesion.

In his keynote speech, Minister of

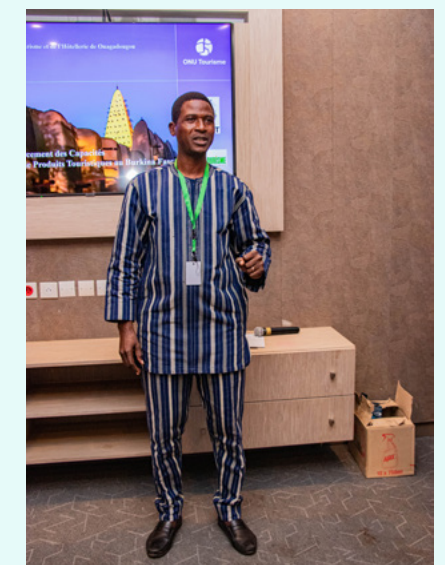
Communication, Culture, Arts, and Tourism Pingwendé Gilbert Ouédraogo emphasized tourism's political and forward-looking role: "Our destinies are intertwined. Tourism can be a powerful unifying force, transcending borders and building bridges of solidarity." He urged stakeholders to foster partnerships and promote a more inclusive, sustainable, and authentic tourism sector.

Ouédraogo also recalled Burkina Faso's major infrastructure projects, initiated under Captain Ibrahim Traoré, to improve access to tourist sites and create a favorable legal framework for private investment.

The Guest Country Ghana, represented by Joseph K. Amo, welcomed the invitation, noting that their participation would further strengthen ties between Accra and Ouagadougou.

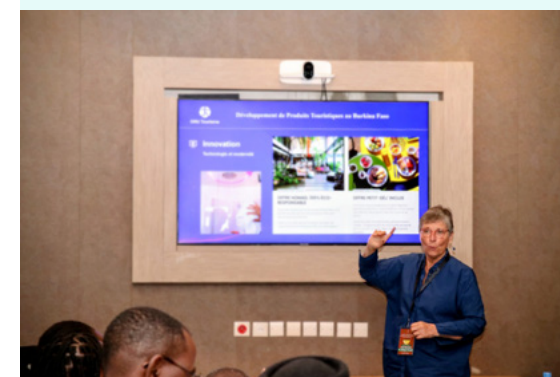
Representing Niger and Mali, Niger's Minister of Handicrafts and Tourism, Aghaichata Guichene Atta, reaffirmed her countries' commitment to working alongside Burkina Faso to promote tourism as a driver of social cohesion and regional unity. She also invited partners to discover Niger's cultural richness at the upcoming AES Festival in Agadez, December 1-3.

Speaking at the opening, Director General of Azalai Hotel Group, a



lead sponsor of the event Mohamed Ag Alhousseini underlined tourism's vital role in job creation and wealth generation: "Tourism knows no borders; it creates opportunities for youth and strengthens the resilience of our economies."

During SITHO, UN Tourism — of which Burkina Faso is an active member — organized a training workshop for 40 tourism stakeholders focused on product development in the sector. In addition, UN Tourism granted 50 online scholarships to the Government of Burkina Faso to strengthen human capital in the industry. SITHO 2025 served as a dynamic platform for collaboration, cultural exchange, and the promotion of Sahelian tourism.





## Africa Recognized as a Rising Force in Global Meetings Industry Trends

What started as a self actualisation project has landed Zambian Mulemwa Moongwa, on the global meetings industry radar, listing her among the twenty finalists on this year's Meetings Industry Trendsetters list published by US based Meetings Today Magazine. The annual list recognizes twenty (20) individuals whose unique contributions to the Meetings and Events Industry make them stand out. In its over three (3) decades of existence, this is the first time the publication has cast a spotlight on an African based industry professional.

Mulemwa's journey in events started when she worked part-time for a party planning business in Lincoln, Nebraska where she was studying the Law. The Law lost an advocate but the Business Events Industry gained a dedicated pioneer. When she moved back to Zambia, she established an events business industry at age 23, setting her on an entrepreneurial journey that has seen her transition from party planning to a decorated career in business events serving major business to government events and government to government engagements. Mulemwa worked as an independent in-house planner for ten years on retainer for the Financial Literacy Project under the German Sparkassenstiftung project in partnership with the Central bank. Even with such high level exposure, the feeling of inadequacy lingered and she has always been in search of qualifications to give her credibility as a professional. The absence of defined career paths in the events industry, coupled with the nonexistence of barriers of entry in the practice of events, birthed a personal journey of validation that has led in to over 15 countries in the last six years.

In 2013, Zambia co-hosted the United Nations Tourism General Assembly in Livingstone, Mulemwa was part of the

consortium of Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs) that submitted an unsuccessful bid as service providers for the General Assembly. It was then that she heard that the local consortium failed to secure the bid due the absence of a Certified Meetings Professional, a prerequisite of the host organisation. The realization that there existed a professional pathway in the events industry that was recognized at UN Tourism, renewed her desire to gain professional credence in her desired vocation. She began the journey with exploring the Certified Meetings Professional (CMP) and a decade ago the cost of study was prohibitive for a self sponsored learner. At the time, the print material was shipped from the United States of America and the closest examination centre was in South Africa. Today, study material is a click away and an exam can be taken in the comfort of your home with the right equipment.

Fast forward to 2019, Mulemwa travelled to Indiana University to attend a residential programme for the Certificate in Meetings Management delivered by the Meetings Professional International (MPI). It wasn't until the pandemic that she fully appreciated the membership benefits of belonging to an industry body. During the lockdown, members of MPI were constantly engaging online with numerous learning opportunities that included management of virtual engagements that gave her instant competitive advantage in revenue generation.

It was during lockdown that she decided to engage the MPI on increasing its involvement in the Africa region. In September 2020, in partnership with Kenyan Kezy Mukiri, they hosted a virtual stakeholder engagement to advocate for the African Meetings Industry. Until 2020, Kezy had hosted the Global MICE Summit in her home town of Nairobi and in recognition of the need for a continent specific platform, the two women collaborated in what has become the Africa MICE Summit. The Africa MICE Summit is built on three core pillars, Sustainability, Technology and People.



Mulemwa Moongwa

Over the past five years, they have split their efforts with Kezy focusing on the first two pillars whilst Mulemwa drove the people agenda.

It is the work in advocating for people development that undoubtedly got her on the radar of the global Meetings industry. She has traversed the globe speaking at major industry events emphasizing the growth of the African business events industry can only be sustainable be achieved if the human factor is prioritized. She is a champion member for the Africa region at MPI as well as a franchisee of the IMEX-MPI Future Leaders Forum. For the past three (3) years during Meetings Africa, she dedicates a full day for the Future Leaders Forum where she shares the learning paths and related career opportunities in Meetings. In September 2025, Mulemwa and Kezy hosted the first in person Africa MICE Summit after five years of online engagements, the event included an edition of the IMEX-MPI Future Leaders Forum at the renowned hospitality school Kenya Utali College.

In 2022, Mulemwa was appointed as Board Chairperson for the Zambia Institute for Tourism & Hospitality Studies (ZITHS), the public institution in her home country dedicated to human development for tourism and its sub sectors. In her signature approach, she went straight to the top. She led her team to the UN Tourism Secretariat in Madrid to appreciate their strategy for human development that Zambia as a member country could benefit from in designing its own strategy. Zambia introduced the Travel, Hospitality and Tourism Education Summit as a platform for constructive dialogue among educators, employers and policy makers to address the evident



skilled and knowledge gaps in the country and the wider region. In 2024, in line with the UN Tourism Education Guidelines, the Zambia Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism integrated Travel and Tourism into the formal school system from Grade One all the way to Form Six. The integration project brought together over 300 educators and 50 industry players over a period of eighteen months. The project was done without a dedicated budget line and the willingness of the two ministries to prioritize the project speaks to the

positioning of the tourism development at government level. During her time as Chairperson, she led numerous projects that brought together multiple stakeholders from across the globe and her highlights include two apprenticeship programme with Diageo Products PLC and the American Embassy as well as the citing of the first UN Tourism Academy for Tourism and Hospitality by the UN Tourism Secretary H.E Zurab Pololashikavili. Mulemwa credits the all hands on deck approach of her full Board and the leadership of the Zambian government for the

successes recorded during her tenure as Chairperson.

As her three year tenure at the helm of tourism education in Zambia, ZITHS became the first school on the African continent to become an accredited International Conventions and Congresses Association University partner. It remains to be seen what she does next, but as Voyagers Afriq, we believe she has only just begun. Congratulations on behalf on Africa and thank you for your service Mulemwa!

## New Travel Booking Platform Launches Featuring Niche Destinations, All-In-One Platform

FlyingCarpet.travel, a new digital destination discovery and booking portal aimed at helping travelers explore more of the world by unlocking some amazing exotic global destinations. The new booking tool offers a selection of more than 400 flights, 300K hotels, 400K activities, airport transfers, and travel insurance with a user-friendly interface. One can choose ones' favorite major airlines that connect with regional airline routes that takes you to a whole new world, with an amazing point of view, full of dazzling places and hidden gems anywhere in the world.

Backed by a team of aviation and distribution experts at AirlinePros International, FlyingCarpet.travel offers both a consumer booking portal and a platform designed for travel agents to book and manage their client reservations, aiming to shift the focus from mass tourism hubs to niche exotic places that deserve a spotlight.

Soon, FlyingCarpet.travel will add an AI-powered trip discovery assistant, an exotic Genie, giving both travelers and travel agents a smarter way to plan unforgettable journeys.

"Over the last 20 years of my work in aviation and travel, the most magical destinations I've visited were the ones I had to work the hardest to reach," said Achma Asokan, co-founder of FlyingCarpet.travel. "FlyingCarpet.travel was built to change that—to bring these special places within reach, and to connect U.S. travelers directly with the local cultures, communities, and experiences that make travel meaningful."

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**“Over the last 20 years of my work in aviation and travel, the most magical destinations I've visited were the ones I had to work the hardest to reach,” said Achma Asokan, co-founder of FlyingCarpet.travel. “FlyingCarpet.travel was built to change that—to bring these special places within reach, and to connect U.S. travelers directly with the local cultures, communities, and experiences that make travel meaningful.”**

Achma Asokan, Co-founder of FlyingCarpet.travel



FlyingCarpet.Travel is collaborating with tourism boards from global destinations like Zambia, Namibia, Antigua & Barbuda and others —providing them with an online channel to showcase more of their regional offerings and connect tourists directly with local accommodations, experiences, and customized itineraries. This approach not only benefits travelers seeking more meaningful journeys, yet also supports local economies in some of the most beautiful places in the world that are not commonly ventured sites.

Travelers can take \$25 off any flight or \$25 any hotel stay for a total of two bookings each with a minimum booking value of \$200 from now until August 31. That's a total of \$50 with our summer deal. No promo code is needed. Discount will appear at checkout.



# Taxing the Take-Off

"The only two certainties in life are death and taxes," the old adage goes. Thankfully, steady safety improvements mean the former is far less likely in African aviation than it once was. But to make up for that, the one certainty that seems determined to climb ever higher is taxation - direct and indirect - on anyone who dares to fly within Africa.

Across the continent, policymakers still behave as if air travel is a luxury for the elite that should be priced and taxed accordingly. The result is a tidy, self-fulfilling prophecy: treat aviation as a playground for the privileged, and you guarantee it remains just that. When taxes and fees swell the final ticket price beyond the reach of ordinary travellers, demand shrinks into the subset of those who can absorb the pain. Smaller market, thinner schedules, higher unit costs - lather, rinse, repeat.

Crucially, the "tax" that strangles demand isn't a single line item. It's a stack: passenger taxes and levies, airport and air navigation service charges, security and health surcharges, visa and insurance fees. Then there are the quasi-taxes - opaque border controls, duplicative inspections, and compliance schemes priced far above the cost to deliver them. Each layer may look modest in isolation but together they build a wall that many would-be passengers choose to never climb.

Consider Tanzania. In 2024, visitors to Zanzibar were hit with a mandatory health insurance fee. Despite the modest extra charge, tourist numbers still grew - a testament to Zanzibar's strong pull and pent-up demand. Emboldened, a similar scheme is now being expanded to the mainland of Tanzania. On top of that, a new airport tax is being introduced for international travellers, ostensibly to fund a digital border control system, but priced well above the apparent cost



of the system itself. By 2026, every visitor will be paying roughly \$200 more than they were in 2024. Is tourism demand for Tanzania so inelastic that it can absorb increase after increase indefinitely? Time will tell, but history usually turns out to be less forgiving than budget projections.

Kenya too is reviewing airport taxes upward. Nigeria has signalled increases to fund an Advance Passenger Information (APIS) system. Let's be clear - funding modern systems and better infrastructure is not optional. The question is whether we can calibrate the price of progress without pricing out the very travellers and airlines who are supposed to benefit. Push too far and you end up taxing the promise out of the project.

Sierra Leone is a cautionary tale hiding in plain sight. Freetown today boasts a gleaming new terminal, a new national airline, and an industry unrecognisable from the dark days of conflict two decades ago. Yet the market remains stifled by high charges and user fees. Fly the 40-minute hop from Freetown to Monrovia and back: you will pay around \$450 in taxes and fees on top of the ticket itself. For airlines, the stack at Freetown - landing fees, ground handling, fuel and so forth - can be double or triple those at other airports in the region. Regulators defend the regime as the cost of recouping private investment in infrastructure, but the end result is an airport that is underserved and underutilised. Build it and they will come - unless you charge so much at the gate that they turn back and go home instead.

Now, flip the coin. Ghana shows how under-pricing a core user fee can also backfire. For various reasons, the domestic Air Passenger Service Charge has been stuck at 5 cedis - about forty US cents - for well over a decade. The intent was affordability but the consequence has been under-funded operations. Ghana Airports Company Limited (GACL), struggling to cover basic costs at domestic airfields, constrained operating hours for years until recently to save on electricity bills and labour costs, dimming the network at precisely the hours when connectivity matters for



commerce. A fee that never moves may be politically comfortable but it can leave infrastructure and service quality frozen in time too.

So, where's the sweet spot? It starts with acknowledging that aviation is an economic enabler first and a revenue line second. If your goal is full planes, frequent schedules, and thriving tourism, you don't treat your passenger like a dairy cow ready to be milked. Aviation generates every kind of revenue that governments say they want - VAT on downstream tourism, corporate taxes from a busier value chain, jobs that generate income tax, and yes, even sustainable airport surpluses to service debt. The fastest way to collect more is often to charge less and let growth do the heavy lifting.

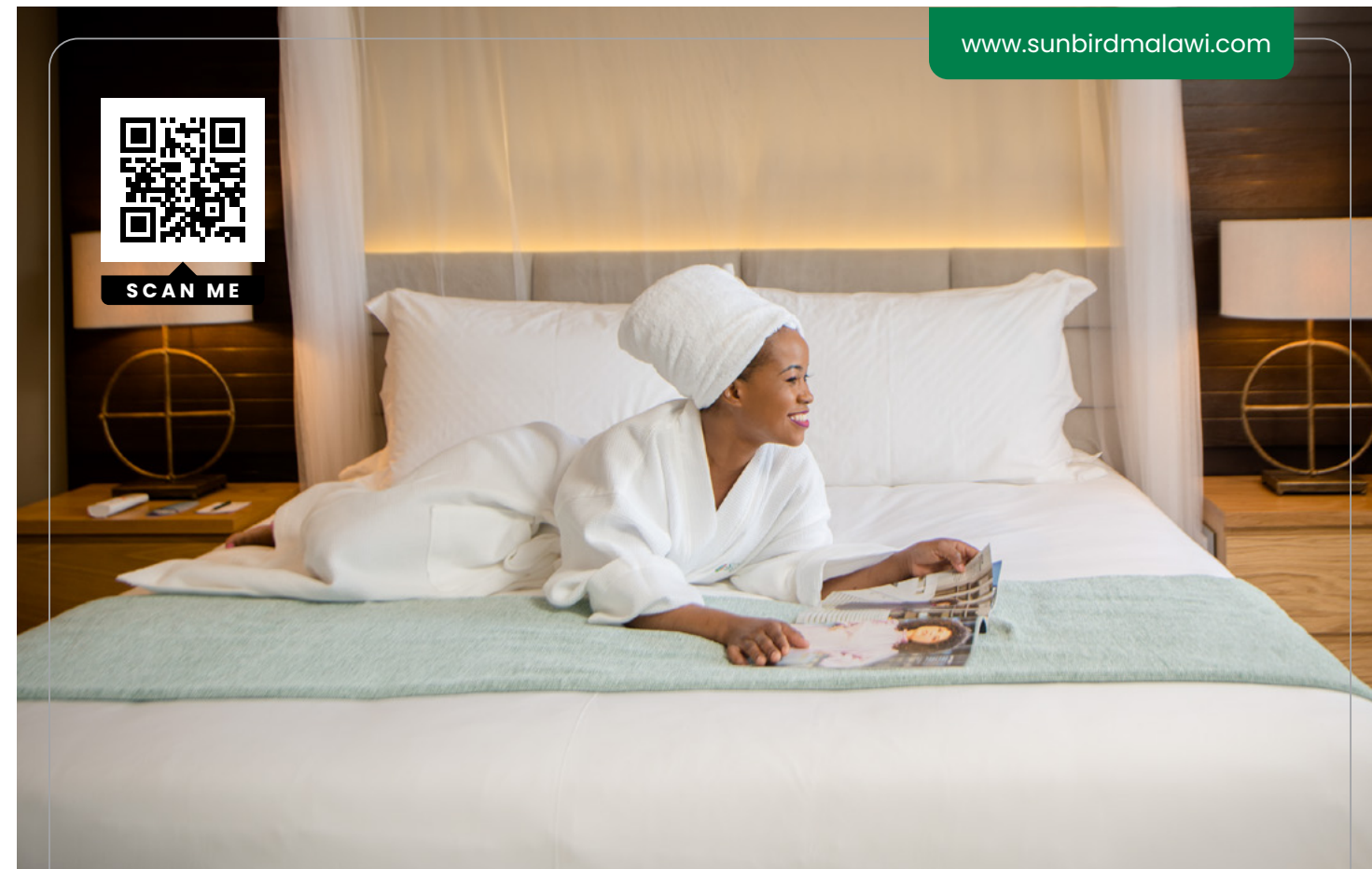
Africa cannot afford to treat the sky as a cash register and the passenger as an ATM. We have built better terminals, safer systems, smarter airlines, and more professional regulators than ever before. Now we need the courage to price connectivity for what it is - a necessity for a modern economy, not a gilded indulgence.



*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.*








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# Lighting the African Spirit:

## Gsole Cigars Tells a Story of Pride, Craft, and Legacy

Gsole, an Angolan cigar brand, traces its origins to an idea conceived in 2018 and to the hand-rolled prototype produced in 2020. The company's founding reflects a personal lineage of tobacco appreciation and a deliberate market assessment. Angola once exported tobacco in quantity during the colonial era, and that historic role helped frame the brand's ambition to rekindle domestic production and place an Angolan cigar on continental and international stages.

"Our journey began with the belief that Angola could once again stand tall in the global cigar landscape," said **Helder Manguiera**, founder of Gsole.

Gsole's flagship line, marketed under the name WOLO, is presently manufactured in Costa Rica. The decision to produce in Costa Rica follows a strategy of conforming to international quality standards, including European and United States Food and Drug Administration rules, and of importing technical know-how that supports quality control and consistent manufacture. The brand reports ongoing efforts to repatriate production to Africa, with a stated objective to produce all key components, including filler, binder, wrapper and packaging, on the continent.

Plans for local supply chains involve joint ventures and sourcing arrangements



Helder Manguiera, founder of Gsole

“Our vision is not only to produce cigars, it's to build a legacy that connects Africa's heritage with global excellence”

with leaf producers in Cameroon, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The company intends the eventual African-made cigar, including a 100 percent African-crafted box, to reflect local agricultural and manufacturing inputs while maintaining the production discipline required by export markets.

"As we build capacity on the continent, every cigar will carry the soul of Africa from the leaf to the box," Manguiera added.

Gsole positions its product within the luxury cigar category, with emphasis on leaf selection, cigar aging, construction, smoke quality and presentation. The company describes a selective approach to leaf procurement and a focus on binder blends and aging protocols intended to deliver a particular aroma and draw. Packaging, described as deliberately upscale, forms part of the brand's value proposition, alongside the finished product's construction and flavor profile.

The brand's development follows identification of an active cigar consumer base across Africa. Gsole frames its offering as an African alternative to established international brands, aiming to capture a share of the continent's growing luxury and lifestyle market. The company describes a twofold challenge, citing consumer preferences that currently favour foreign brands and the capital intensity required to compete at scale. Awareness-building to shift domestic consumption patterns remains a central goal.

Gsole reports commercial and promotional milestones in several



markets outside Angola. The brand has registered attention in Zambia and Brazil, and it cites recent exposure in Nigeria linked to prominent personalities, including a noted footballer, which the company regards as elevating its profile. Organizers mention prospective partnerships with events such as E1 as potential platforms to extend reach and to establish Gsole as an official celebratory cigar at high-

profile sporting and cultural occasions.

Producing to international quality standards while transferring technical expertise to African operations is a stated priority. Gsole is working to import manufacturing know-how from Costa Rica, with the stated aim of implementing equivalent quality control systems when onshore production begins. The company frames adherence to European and FDA rules as part of its preparation for broader market access.

The brand's stated strategy includes cultural positioning, an appeal to national pride and a drive to establish domestic and continental consumption habits analogous to those seen in other cigar-producing nations. Leadership cites familial influence, membership in aficionados' clubs and formal study of the sector as motivators for entering the market, and the company expresses a long-term objective: to become the cigar most smoked by the African elite.

"Our vision is not only to produce cigars, it's to build a legacy that connects Africa's heritage with global excellence," said **Helder Manguiera**.

Gsole acknowledges structural constraints, including capital limitations and competition from established international firms with deeper distribution and promotional resources. The transition to Africa-based manufacture requires investment in agronomy, leaf-processing capacity, skilled rollers, and quality-assurance systems. The company has articulated plans to address these requirements through joint ventures with regional leaf suppliers and planned technical transfers from its Costa Rican operations.

Gsole's stated roadmap moves from concept to interim offshore production and, ultimately, to an Africa-sourced product. The brand's record to date combines product development, targeted regional exposure and an articulated supply-chain strategy. Realising the full ambition of a 100 percent African cigar will depend on successful partnerships with leaf suppliers, investment in local manufacturing capability, regulatory compliance and shifts in domestic and regional consumer behaviour that favour African-made premium cigars.

## Airlink completes Embraer E195-E2 Deal

São José dos Campos, Brazil – Airlink, Southern Africa's premium airline, has concluded its lease agreement with Azorra with the formal acceptance of the first three of ten new Embraer E195-E2 jetliners.

The lease agreement, which was finalised in August, sees Azorra, the Fort Lauderdale-based lease, finance and asset management firm, providing the newly-built aircraft to the Johannesburg-headquartered airline and bolstering its current all-Embraer fleet.

The new aircraft, which seat up to 136 passengers in a two-by-two cabin layout, will provide Airlink with additional capacity to better compete on high-density routes such as Johannesburg-Cape Town, while the E195-E2s additional range will open new route opportunities to connect more destinations and markets across sub-Saharan Africa.

Airlink CEO, Mr de Villiers Engelbrecht, says: "The integration of the E195-E2s into Airlink's fleet is an important milestone in the company's 33-year history and will set it on a new trajectory. In addition to the operational and commercial flexibility the larger and more capable aircraft offer, they will also unlock additional efficiencies and cost savings from the high degree of operating, maintenance, training and equipment commonality with our existing E-Jets. The new E2s and our current E-Jets have very similar flightdecks, operating procedures and handling characteristics. This will also ensure a streamlined entry into service."

John Evans, CEO at Azorra, says: "The delivery of these first three E195-E2s marks an exciting milestone in our partnership with Airlink. Together with Embraer and Pratt & Whitney, we're pleased to support Airlink's continued



growth with advanced, fuel-efficient aircraft that enhance performance and passenger comfort. We look forward to supporting Airlink as it deploys the E2 across its expanding network in Southern Africa."





## One Nation Reggae Festival Marks Sierra Leone's Return as a Cultural Heritage Hub

Sierra Leone's One Nation Reggae Festival returns this November with a renewed focus on cultural connection and tourism promotion. Set to take place from 25–30 November 2025 in Freetown, the festival has been repositioned as "Sierra Leone's Grand Homecoming", a cultural bridge linking Sierra Leone and the Caribbean through music, heritage, and shared identity.

The upcoming edition follows a successful preview held on 1 August 2025 at the Family Kingdom Resort along Aberdeen Beach Road. That event, organized under the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs' "2025 Year of Ecotourism" initiative in collaboration with Olive's Garden and Reggae Union Sierra Leone, brought together local residents, members of the diaspora, and international visitors. It featured performances from Reggae Union Sierra Leone, Alonso, and other renowned artists.

In attendance were the Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Hon. Nabeela Farida Tunis, the Deputy Minister, Kadija Ahene Kamara, and the Permanent Secretary, Judith Jones, alongside staff of the Ministry and its subvented agencies. In her remarks, Minister Tunis reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to fostering inclusive and culturally enriching platforms that unify Sierra Leoneans while promoting the nation's touristic identity. She described reggae as a universal sound of peace and resilience, aligning with the goals of the "Year of Ecotourism" campaign.

The festival's repositioning introduces a broader cultural narrative that blends the rhythms of Bubu, Maringa, and Roots Reggae, symbolizing unity, heritage, and empowerment. It aims to showcase Sierra Leone's evolving cultural identity and strengthen links with the Caribbean and African diaspora.

The One Nation Reggae Festival will unfold in two major phases:

- Pre-Festival Teaser and Launch Party (Early November) – An opening activation designed to generate national awareness and anticipation.
- Main Festival Week (25–30 November) – A full-scale celebration featuring music, art, gastronomy, and cultural exhibitions.

The main festival will feature performances by Arqane, Lucan, Jah Thunder, DJ SKS, Charles Hyatt, and Awadi, among others. The program will include cultural showcases, craft markets, and culinary experiences designed to highlight Sierra Leonean and Caribbean artistry.

According to the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, the One Nation Reggae Festival forms part of its broader vision to position culture as a key driver of sustainable tourism growth, job creation, and diaspora engagement. The initiative will involve inter-agency collaboration and partnerships with the private sector to ensure safety, inclusivity, and measurable community benefit.

The Ministry has indicated that the festival is expected to attract visitors from across Africa and the diaspora. The event is designed to complement the country's ongoing tourism development strategy, highlighting Sierra Leone's capacity to host large-scale, culturally rooted events that contribute to national growth.

Preparations are currently underway with an emphasis on effective coordination, logistics, and community participation. The Ministry has underscored its commitment to ensuring that the festival's outcomes extend beyond the stage, benefiting local businesses, artists, and cultural entrepreneurs.

As Sierra Leone continues its "Year of Ecotourism" campaign, the One Nation Reggae Festival stands as a significant initiative to enhance the nation's image as a vibrant, welcoming destination for cultural exchange, artistic celebration, and tourism investment.

Minister of Tourism Nabeela Tunis



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## AFRICA AT THE 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP: A New Dawn of Tourism Opportunity

The 2026 FIFA World Cup will mark a defining chapter in Africa's football journey and its global tourism positioning. For the first time in history, the continent will send a minimum of nine national teams to the world's greatest sporting stage — Morocco, Ghana, South Africa, Cape Verde, Senegal, Egypt, Côte d'Ivoire, Algeria and Tunisia — with the prospect of a tenth nation emerging from a play-off group featuring Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

This is truly unprecedented, offering Africa a unique opportunity to showcase its diversity, landscapes, cultures and tourism offerings. Until now, Africa's highest representation at a World Cup was five teams, most recently witnessed



The Black Stars of Ghana



at Qatar 2022. This historic expansion, championed under FIFA President Gianni Infantino, deserves recognition for opening greater competitive space to regions historically underrepresented. Yet, Africa's journey is far from complete. True parity will require continued advocacy, investment, and a vision that sees the continent not only as a participant but as a contender — both on the pitch and in the global tourism economy.

### The Global Stage: Where Sport Meets Soft Power

To appreciate the opportunity, one must consider the scale of the platform Africa is entering. The FIFA World Cup is the world's most-watched sporting event, surpassing even the Olympics in concentrated viewership and digital reach. At Qatar 2022, over 5 billion people engaged with the tournament



Mo Salah of the  
Pharaohs of Egypt

across media platforms. The final between Argentina and France alone drew nearly 1.5 billion viewers — one in every five people on Earth.

Digital engagement reached unprecedented heights: 262 billion views across official programming, 186 billion minutes watched on traditional television, and FIFA+ recording over 211 million unique users. In comparison, the Paris 2024 Summer Olympics attracted roughly 5 billion viewers, representing 84 per cent of potential global viewership. The World Cup, however, commands a different kind of spotlight: passionate, emotional, tribal and enduring. Social media produced an estimated 412 billion engagements from 270 million posts, signalling that global



The Atlas Lions of Morocco

attention now extends well beyond stadiums.

These numbers are more than statistics — they reflect influence, visibility and soft power. For the first time, Africa will have nine separate national narratives within that mirror. Perhaps ten by the time the playoffs conclude.

### Meet the Big Nine From Africa

#### Morocco — A Continental Standard in Sport-Led Tourism

Morocco exemplifies the integration of football success with tourism ambition. After reaching the semi-finals at Qatar 2022 — the first African team to do so — international interest in the country surged. The Moroccan National Tourist Office (ONMT) worked alongside the Royal Moroccan Football Federation (FRMF) to translate football enthusiasm into tourism promotion.

Now co-hosting the 2030 FIFA World Cup with Spain and Portugal, Morocco has aligned stadium renovations with hotel expansions, fan mobility with aviation strategy, and football passion with cultural showcasing. Cities such as Marrakesh, Rabat, Casablanca and Tangier are positioned not only as venues but as global travel experiences. Morocco offers a blueprint for other African nations: football success can become economic and cultural leverage.

#### The Black Star Experience — From Culture to Sport Tourism

Ghana, preparing for its fifth FIFA World Cup, enters 2026 with more than footballing ambition — it carries cultural capital. The landmark Year of Return

in 2019, together with the December in GH festival, positioned Ghana as a hub for Afro-diasporic reconnection, culture, music and history. The country has shown it can turn heritage into experiential tourism.

With North America as one of its largest diaspora markets, Ghana can now extend this cultural bridge into sport tourism. The Black Stars are a global symbol of pride, celebrated from New York to Toronto, Washington and Atlanta. A Black Star Experience campaign could unite football, culture and homecoming, inviting visitors to move from matches to Cape Coast castles, the streets of Accra, and the royal legacy of Kumasi. Rather than focusing solely on results, Ghana can champion identity — positioning itself as the emotional heart of Africa.



Bafana Bafana Star

Collaboration is key. By aligning the Ministry of Youth and Sports with the Ministry of Tourism, the Ghana Tourism Authority, airlines, tour operators and diplomatic missions, Ghana can create Follow Ghana packages, cultural showcases and diaspora activations. The greatest victory may not be scored on the pitch, but in the arrivals at Kotoka International Airport, where football passion transforms into cultural pilgrimage.

### South Africa — Legacy Ready to Be Reawakened

South Africa's qualification for 2026 revives the legacy of 2010, when the nation hosted the World Cup. With world-class stadiums, hospitality infrastructure and strong international air access, the country remains a recognised tourism brand. Bafana Bafana offers an opportunity to reconnect with fans and introduce newcomers to South Africa's rich experiences — from Johannesburg's urban energy to Cape Town's coastal splendour and the wildlife of Kruger and Eastern Cape.

The aim is clear: convert sporting visits into long-term tourism engagement. Sport can be the gateway to South Africa's diverse cultural, adventure and leisure offerings, ensuring that fans return long after the final whistle.

### Cape Verde — A New Flag Rising

Cape Verde's first World Cup qualification is both historic and transformative for its tourism brand. The islands, already popular for European travellers seeking beaches, music and Morabeza hospitality, can now use football to amplify visibility. With diasporic connections to Portugal, Brazil and North America, Cape Verde can blend sporting pride with cultural promotion, positioning itself as more than a hidden gem — a must-visit destination. Visibility, in this instance, is opportunity.

### Continental Strength — Senegal, Egypt, Côte d'Ivoire, Algeria, Tunisia

These nations add depth, diversity and cultural magnetism to Africa's World Cup presence:

- Senegal embodies unity, discipline and creative energy. Dakar's emerging arts scene, Gorée Island's heritage



The Desert Foxes of Algeria





Senegal's Topsman Sadio Mane

and Saly's coastal lifestyle offer a gateway to West Africa's rhythm.

- Egypt merges ancient wonder with modern ambition. Pyramids, Nile cruises, the Grand Egyptian Museum and Mohamed Salah's influence create a fusion of sport and heritage tourism.
- Côte d'Ivoire, AFCON 2023 champions, showcase national pride through infrastructure and culture, from Abidjan's skyline to Yamoussoukro's basilica and Grand-Bassam's coastal charm.
- Algeria returns with fervour, offering desert mystique, Roman ruins, the Sahara's grandeur and rising stars like Mohamed Amoura as tourism and football ambassadors.
- Tunisia, unbeaten in qualification, blends Mediterranean elegance with African authenticity, historic medinas, coastal resorts and culinary diversity — an ideal bridge for tourism narratives.



The Elephants of Cote d'Ivoire

Hope For a Tenth Flag: Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon and DR Congo – The Playoff Path

Four nations remain in contention for a possible tenth African spot. Regardless of the outcome, their participation underscores the continent's depth and narrative reach. Nigeria brings a vast diaspora and creative economy potential, Cameroon a strong sporting legacy, Gabon remarkable biodiversity, and DR Congo a vibrant music and cultural identity. Their journey itself is a story of continental pride.



The Blue Sharks of Cabo Verde

### United Africa – The Power of Nine on the Global Stage

That said, Africa's presence in 2026 is a unique opportunity to coordinate continental branding. Beyond football, it is a platform to showcase culture, heritage and modern identity to billions. By aligning tourism boards, creative industries, and diplomatic missions, Africa can offer joint travel packages, cultural festivals, and heritage trails — inviting the world to explore beyond stadiums.

True strength lies in collaboration. Rather than individual promotion, Africa can present itself as a single, vibrant destination. From Morocco's historic cities to Ghana's cultural hubs, Egypt's wonders to Cape Verde's islands, the continent has the narratives to captivate global audiences. Strategic coordination could make 2026 Africa's stage not just for sport, but for tourism, culture, and continental pride.

### A Call to African Tourism Stakeholders

The World Cup is not just a tournament. To participate in, it is a platform for influence, invitation and identity. African nations can engage tourism through:

- Joint campaigns between football federations and tourism boards
- Diaspora travel programmes linked with fixtures

- Digital storytelling combining destinations and star players

- Air connectivity initiatives for fan travel

- Cultural exhibitions at host cities such as Toronto, New York, Los Angeles and Vancouver

In 2026, Africa's victory will be measured not only in goals but in arrivals, brand visibility, and global perception.

### Infantino's Expansion: A Step Forward, Not the Destination

Africa owes gratitude to FIFA's expansion, increasing slots from five to nine (potentially ten). This acknowledges the continent's talent and passion. Yet, inclusion is only the beginning. True influence requires



The Cathage Eagles of Tunisia

stronger infrastructure, coaching, preparation, and strategic alignment between football associations, tourism ministries and creative industries. Africa must move from inclusion to influence.

### A New Story for Africa

For decades, Africa's World Cup narrative has been emotional — goals, near misses, rhythm in the stands. In 2026, the continent writes a new chapter: where football drives tourism, investment, and nation branding. Nine flags are ready; a tenth may follow. Together, they carry the continent's dreams of visibility, pride and economic opportunity. The world may come for football — but Africa must ensure they stay for culture, heritage, hospitality and hope.

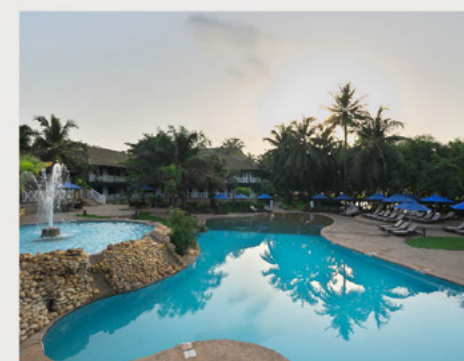
In 2026, Africa will not only compete. Africa will welcome.

Africa, the world is waiting — not only to see how you play, but where you invite them next.



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# Tourism Calendar of Events

January 8-11 2026	<b>Vakantiebeurs Tourism Fair</b> <b>Venue:</b> Jaarbeursplein Utrecht, Netherlands <b>Contact:</b> +31 30 295 5911 <b>About:</b> At Vakantiebeurs, the largest travel event in the Benelux, you can step into your next dream trip. Let yourself be taken along by enthusiastic travel experts and discover adventures you never knew existed.
January 21-25 2026	<b>FITUR 2026</b> <b>Venue:</b> Feria de Madrid, Spain <b>Contact:</b> +34 91 722 30 00 <b>About:</b> FITUR is an event organized by IFEMA MADRID spanning five days and welcomes both trade visitors from the tourism industry interested in the latest industry trends, and the general public who come for first-hand information about the destinations on show.
February 23-25 2026	<b>Meetings Africa 2026</b> <b>Venue:</b> Sandton, Johannesburg South Africa <b>Contact:</b> +27 11 325 0020 <b>About:</b> Meetings Africa is a 2-day trade show with a dedicated educational day, BOND Day that is executed in conjunction with the key global, continental and national industry associations to provide a platform for exhibitors to showcase their offerings to International and local buyers, African associations and corporate planners.
Feb - Mar 25-1 2026	<b>BTL Travel Market</b> <b>Venue:</b> Lisbon, Portugal <b>Contact:</b> +351 21 892 1500 <b>Email:</b> Jaarbeursplein Utrecht, Netherlands <b>About:</b> BTL Travel Market is the largest tourism event in Portugal. Bringing together destinations, companies, professionals, and the general public annually, BTL is the ideal meeting place to promote business, share industry news, and foster strategic partnerships.
March 3-5 2026	<b>ITB Berlin 2026</b> <b>Venue:</b> Messe Berlin <b>Contact:</b> <b>Email:</b> itb@messe-berlin.de <b>About:</b> ITB Berlin is the world's leading travel trade show, bringing together tourism professionals, destinations, and industry leaders from over 170 countries each year at Messe Berlin to drive innovation and collaboration in global travel and hospitality.
March - April 31-1 2026	<b>Future Hospitality Summit Africa</b> <b>Venue:</b> Nairobi, Kenya <b>Contact:</b> <b>Email:</b> mala.patel@thebench.com <b>About:</b> Africa Hospitality Investment Forum is Africa's premier meeting place of leaders in the hospitality sector, attracting hotel and real estate investors, owners and developers, global hotel operator CEOs and prominent advisory services from across the African continent and beyond.
April 9-11 2026	<b>Kriol Jazz Festival, Praia</b> <b>Venue:</b> Praia, Cabo Verde <b>Contact:</b> +336 214 946 51 <b>Email:</b> harmonia.producao@gmail.com <b>About:</b> The Kriol Jazz Festival is a fusion of music from different origins all on one stage. Discover a selection of the best artists from the creole world for a program based upon exchanging as much on a musical level as on a human level.

# Tourism Calendar of Events

April 10-12 2026	<b>ILTM Africa</b> <b>Venue:</b> Cape Town, South Africa <b>Contact:</b> +27 010 496 3500 <b>About:</b> ILTM Africa is a high-end, invitation-only luxury trade show where global travel agents meet Africa's most spectacular luxury travel experience providers
April 13-15 2026	<b>WTM Africa 2026</b> <b>Venue:</b> Cape Town International Convention Centre, South Africa <b>Contact:</b> +27 82 558 8214 <b>About:</b> World Travel Market Africa is the leading exhibition for the inbound and outbound African travel & tourism markets. WTM Africa creates personal and business opportunities through its industry networks, global reach and regional focus, providing our customers with quality contacts, content and communities.
May 4-7 2026	<b>Arabian Travel Market</b> <b>Venue:</b> Dubai, UAE <b>Contact:</b> +44 (0) 20 8271 2158 <b>About:</b> Arabian Travel Market, known as ATM, is a travel and tourism event, organized annually in Dubai to provide a platform for inbound and outbound tourism professionals in the Middle East and gives information on tourism destinations, accommodation options, tourism attractions and aviation industry in the Middle East and around the world.
May 14-16 2026	<b>IMEX Frankfurt</b> <b>Venue:</b> Frankfurt, Germany <b>Contact:</b> +44 (0) 1273 227311 <b>About:</b> 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 16 2026	<b>Seychelles Nature Trail</b> <b>Venue:</b> Mahe, Seychelles <b>Contact:</b> 0692 655 541 <b>About:</b> Seychelles Nature Trail is an eco-endurance event held on Mahé that combines physical challenge, biodiversity and cultural immersion. The 22 km route winds through Cap Ternay, Anse Major, Mare aux Cochons, Cassedent and Tomassin, culminating at Grand Anse Mahé, and includes sustainability features like waste separation, eco-hydration points, and community engagement.
June 4-7 2026	<b>Karibu KiliFair 2026</b> <b>Venue:</b> Arusha, Tanzania <b>Contact:</b> +255 (0) 767 668 245 <b>About:</b> Karibu-KiliFair is East Africa's largest tourism and industry exposition, held annually in Arusha, Tanzania at Magereza Grounds, where over 500 exhibitors from more than a dozen countries gather for business networking, trade, and cultural exchange
June 10-13 2026	<b>8th AviaDev Africa</b> <b>Venue:</b> Gaborone, Botswana <b>Contact:</b> <b>Email:</b> mala.patel@thebench.com <b>About:</b> AviaDev Africa is the premier platform dedicated to growing connectivity to, from, and within the African continent. Bringing together airports, airlines, tourism authorities, governments, and industry suppliers, AviaDev offers attendees the ability to pre-arrange meetings, learn from industry peers, and make those important connections.



# Travel & Tourism Blitz

## Burkina Faso scraps visa fees for all African visitors



Burkina Faso has removed visa fees for all African travellers, a move aimed at boosting the free movement of people and goods across the continent.

"From now on, any citizen from an African country wishing to go to Burkina Faso will not pay any amount to cover visa fees," stated Security Minister Mahamadou Sana after a cabinet meeting chaired on Thursday by military leader Capt Ibrahim Traoré.

The minister clarified that while entry is visa-free, African visitors will still need to complete an online visa application, which will be subject to approval.

With this decision, Burkina Faso joins other African nations including Ghana, Rwanda, and Kenya in easing travel restrictions for fellow Africans.

## Fastjet Zimbabwe adds capacity on Johannesburg-Harare route

Fastjet Zimbabwe has announced the introduction of an additional early morning flight frequency on the popular Johannesburg to Harare route. The service commencing on the 29th of September 2025 will operate daily except Saturdays using the airline's Embraer ERJ145 aircraft. Speaking at the Sanganai Hlanganani Kumbanayi Tourism Expo in Mutare, Nunurai Ndawana, fastjet Zimbabwe spokesman, said, "Aviation is a catalyst for economic development, we believe our morning service will contribute to the smooth movement of businesspeople, therefore strengthening the trade relations between Johannesburg and Harare".

Vivian Ruwuya, fastjet Zimbabwe Chief Commercial Officer, remarked, "We are always looking at providing our customers with flexible flight times to better suit their travel needs. In the past months, we have witnessed a growing demand from businesspeople for an early morning departure from Johannesburg to Harare. Our fastjet flight FN8220 now allows our customers an early morning departure from Johannesburg, resulting in a full business day in Harare". "The additional flight supporting the Johannesburg to Harare route is already available for booking", she concluded.

# Travel & Tourism Blitz

## Team Brazil Makes History as Lagos Hosts Africa's First-Ever E1 Championship Race

Team Brazil by Claire Group secured a landmark win at the E1 Lagos GP presented by FirstBank, delivering the first all-electric RaceBird championship victory staged on African soil and setting the stage for a dramatic season finale in Miami.

The penultimate round of the UIM E1 World Championship unfolded on the Lagos Lagoon across 4-5 October 2025 and carried both sporting and symbolic weight: it was the series' African debut, a test of electric marine racing in tropical conditions and a high-profile statement about Lagos as a venue for world-class, sustainability-driven sport. Qualifying had ended with Team Brazil on pole, ahead of Team Rafa and Aoki Racing Team. The two points awarded to Team Rafa for second place in qualifying briefly reclaimed the Championship lead from Team Brady by a single point, after the NFL-owned team suffered technical difficulties that curtailed its own challenge for pole position.

Race day was delayed by a tropical storm that swept over the lagoon, but when conditions permitted, the crews produced a tense, tactical contest. Team Brazil's pilots, Timmy Hansen and Ieva Millere-Hagin, proved most adept at navigating the testing conditions; Hansen was named PIF Pilot of the Race. Virat Kohli's Team Blue Rising took second place and Team Drogba Global Africa finished third, giving the home-continent entry a podium moment in front of thousands of spectators who lined the waterfront.

The result further tightened the championship narrative as teams head to the season decider. The weekend's outcomes altered the leaderboard dynamics and intensified the duel for the title; Team Brady retook the World Championship lead and will carry that advantage into Miami, but the margin remains narrow and the contest unresolved.

Rodi Basso, founder and CEO of E1, spoke to the wider significance of the weekend: "The warm welcome we have received in Lagos has been incredible. The people and passion of Nigeria has made this historic

E1 Lagos GP presented by FirstBank possible, and I feel a great sense of pride that we have made racing here a reality. Our ambition is to build a motorsport legacy in Africa. This weekend's race is just the beginning and today's qualifying sessions have provided a thrilling taste of what's to come on race day tomorrow." After the race he added, "We made history in Lagos today. This weekend's race is a landmark moment for our World Championship and for Africa, proving the continent's appetite for motorsport, sustainability, and technological innovation."

The presence of football icon Didier Drogba and co-owner Gabrielle Lemaire, who supported Team Drogba Global Africa from the waterfront, underscored the event's crossover appeal and its local resonance. The fan zone, commercial activations and festival atmosphere around Victoria Island reflected a broader ambition: to position Lagos not simply as a temporary host but as a city capable of staging major international events that combine sport, culture and sustainability messaging.

Beyond the podium and pageantry, the Lagos stop highlighted the practical contours of E1's proposition: RaceBirds and electric propulsion align competitive spectacle with a low-emission narrative, while the event creates opportunities for partnerships in clean-energy technology, marine innovation and the blue economy. At the same time, the weekend surfaced operational realities thus; weather, waterfront logistics and community inclusion that organizers and host authorities will need to manage as the series seeks to embed itself in new regions.

Lagos now joins Monaco, Dubrovnik and Doha among cities that have hosted an E1 race and the Championship moves on to a North American finale where the 2026 "Champions of the Water" will be determined. With the title fight still very much alive, Miami promises a high-stakes conclusion after a weekend in Lagos that mixed firsts, fierce competition and clear intent.



For the sport, the city and the series, the message was straightforward: electric marine racing can work at scale in Africa, and when it does, it brings new audiences, new investment and a renewed emphasis on sustainable innovation for regional waterways.

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## SA Tourism appoints new Acting CEO

SA Tourism COO Darryl Erasmus has been appointed Acting CEO of the entity amid ongoing controversy surrounding the dissolution of the former Board by Tourism Minister Patricia de Lille.

De Lille's spokesperson Aldrin Sampear said Erasmus was confirmed as Acting CEO after the recommendation was made by the interim Board.

His appointment follows the suspension of former CEO Nombulelo Guliwe by members of the former Board. The Board was subsequently dissolved by De Lille who maintains that the decision was made in contravention of the Tourism Act and Board Charter.

Members of the disbanded Board are

taking legal action against De Lille in the North Gauteng High Court, calling for her decision to be declared unlawful,

that it be set aside and that the former Board is reinstated.





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