

VoyagesAfric

ISSUE 037 | January 2026 Edition

Africa's Leading Travel and Tourism Magazine

Shaikha Al Nowais Pledges Inclusive and Purpose-Driven Leadership as She Assumes Office as UN Tourism Secretary-General. pg. 8



ISSN 2550-3405



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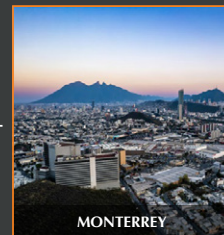
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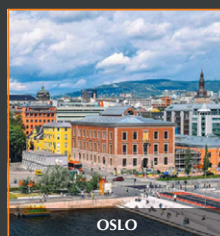


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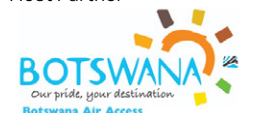
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VoyagesAfriq

Travel and Tourism Magazine

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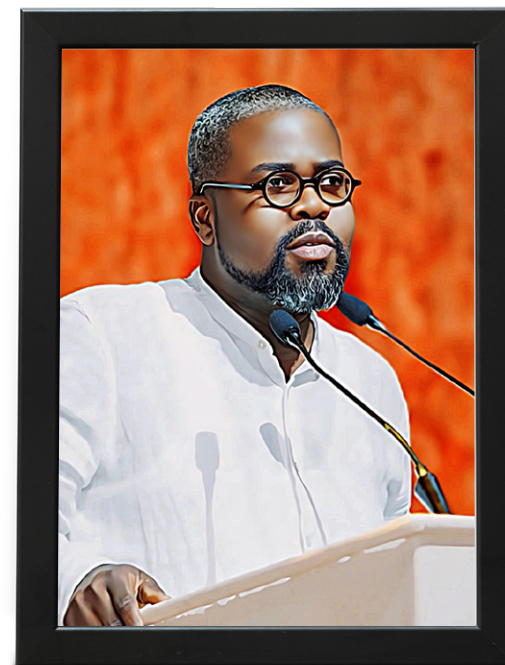
Publisher
AfroViayes Media Services LTD.

Dear Reader,

As we usher in our first edition of the year, VoyagesAfriq extends warm season's greetings and heartfelt appreciation to our global community for the support and engagement throughout 2025. We look ahead with optimism and confidence to a very prosperous 2026.

This January issue marks a significant and symbolic start to the global tourism calendar. The year opens with a historic transition at UN Tourism, following eight transformative years of leadership under Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili as Secretary-General. His tenure has now given way to a new chapter with the appointment of Ms. Shaikha Al Nowais, who makes history as both the first woman and the youngest leader to head the organization in its 50-year existence.

This edition coincides with FITUR, one of the world's premier travel fairs and the event that traditionally kickstarts the international tourism calendar. We place the spotlight on the beginning of Ms. Al Nowais' mandate as UN Tourism Secretary-General, offering an in-depth report on her acceptance speech in Riyadh and the five key pillars that will guide her tenure - anchored strongly in inclusive and transformational leadership. VoyagesAfriq wishes her every success and reaffirms its commitment to supporting her work.



Kojo Bentum-Williams

Beyond the headline moment of the 26th UN Tourism General Assembly, this issue goes deeper into the major outcomes of the gathering. These include the endorsement of China to host a UN Tourism Regional Office, the ratification of the Africa-Americas Summit, and the confirmation of Cabo Verde and El Salvador as hosts of the 2026 and 2027 World Tourism Day celebrations respectively. The baton has also officially passed to the Dominican Republic, which will host the 27th UN Tourism General Assembly in 2027.

We further examine how more than 20 African destinations are positioning themselves to engage with the global travel marketplace at FITUR. Beyond traditional market activations, we explore how destinations are adopting innovative and unconventional approaches to inspire their core source markets. In an exclusive interview conducted on the margins of the General Assembly, Seychelles' Minister of Tourism and Culture, Amanda

Bernstein, shares her vision for the archipelago's tourism future.

Sierra Leone's Minister of Tourism, Nabeela Farida Tunis, also speaks with VoyagesAfric on her country's readiness to host the 2026 UN Tourism Regional Gastronomy Forum for Africa, the current state of tourism in the West African nation, and the evolving role of women in tourism leadership.

This edition also pays tribute to Craig, the iconic elephant who passed away last month. In a moving tribute penned by our Editor-at-Large, Francis Doku, readers are taken down memory lane to reflect on Craig's legacy and what he symbolized for conservation and Africa's natural heritage.

As you plan your travels for 2026, we present a curated selection of destinations worth considering as you explore the region. The continent itself is gearing up for an exciting year, with major events on the horizon: the 70th UN Tourism

Commission for Africa meeting in Seychelles; the Future Hospitality Summit Africa in Nairobi, Kenya, from March 31 to April 1; Aviadev marking its 10th anniversary in Gaborone, Botswana; and Meetings Africa celebrating 20 years as the continent's leading MICE event, with insights shared by a founding leader from SAACI.

Aviation – an undeniable cornerstone of tourism growth – returns to the spotlight through an incisive analysis by our in-house expert. In his latest article, "Talk Is Cheap, Airfare Is Not," he challenges policymakers to move beyond rhetoric and create enabling frameworks that truly support the sector.






While 2026 has already begun against a backdrop of geopolitical tensions, the outlook for Africa's tourism industry remains promising, resilient, and full of opportunity.

As you turn the pages of this edition, we wish you an engaging and insightful read

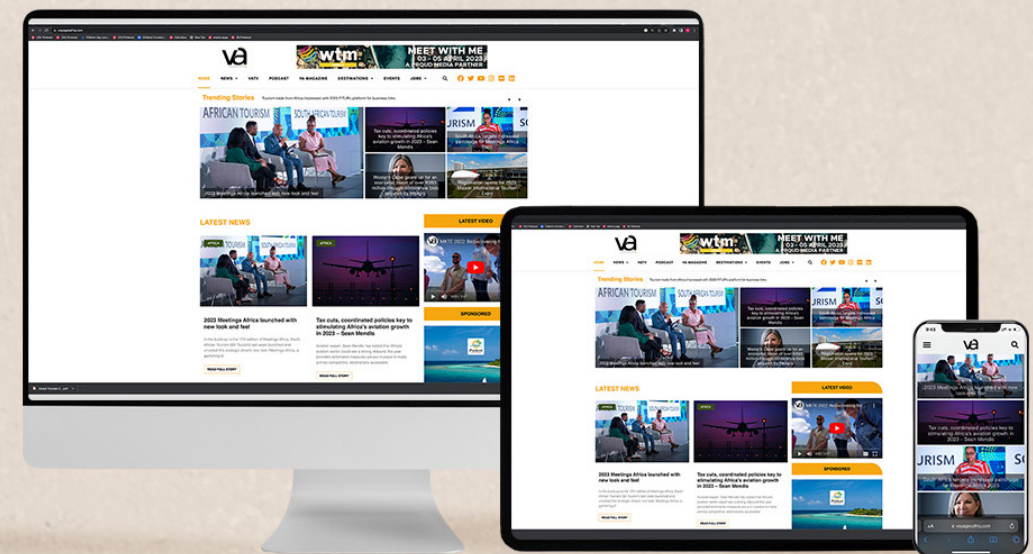


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Zurab Pololikashvili and Shaikha Al Nowais in a handshake at the general assembly to signify the transition to new leadership

Shaikha Al Nowais Pledges Inclusive and Purpose-Driven Leadership as She Assumes Office as UN Tourism Secretary-General

In a landmark moment for global tourism governance, Her Excellency Shaikha Nasser Al Nowais of the United Arab Emirates delivered a powerful and forward-looking acceptance speech following her election as Secretary-General of UN Tourism. Addressing ministers, ambassadors and delegates at the 26th UN Tourism General Assembly in Riyadh, she pledged to lead the organisation with “gratitude, determination, and a profound sense of purpose”.

Her election represents a historic breakthrough. Shaikha Al Nowais becomes the first woman to assume the role in the organisation’s 50-year history, marking a defining chapter for international tourism leadership. Her address struck a tone of humility and shared responsibility, positioning her



Shaikha Al Nowais speaking at the 125th Executive Council Meeting in Riyadh



Former Secretary General Zurab Pololikashvili

victory not as a personal achievement but as a collective milestone for the global tourism community.

“This is not the victory of one – it is a triumph for all of us,” she stated. “A shared moment that reflects our collective vision for a stronger, more connected, and more compassionate world of tourism.”

A New Era of Vision and Purpose

Expressing sincere appreciation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for hosting the historic Assembly, Shaikha Al Nowais commended the country’s strategic commitment to positioning tourism as a central pillar of its economic transformation. She paid tribute to H.E. Ahmed Al Khateeb, Minister of Tourism; Her Highness Princess Haifa bint Mohammed Al Saud, Vice Minister of Tourism; and Her Highness Princess Sara bint Abdulaziz Al Saud, Deputy Minister of Tourism, for their “gracious support, leadership, and passion for advancing the tourism sector”.

“Hosting this gathering here in Saudi Arabia reflects the Kingdom’s leadership and ambition,” she noted. “It is a powerful testament to tourism’s role as a driver of economic opportunity, a bridge between cultures, and a force for peace.”

Her remarks underscored the growing importance of the Middle East as a global tourism hub and an influential voice in shaping the sector’s future.

Honouring Zurab Pololikashvili’s Legacy

Shaikha Al Nowais also acknowledged the contribution of the outgoing Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili, whose two terms in office steered UN Tourism through one of the most challenging and transformative periods in its history.

“I would like to recognise the leadership of Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, who over the past eight years has guided UN Tourism with vision and commitment, strengthening its voice

“ *I would like to recognise the leadership of Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, who over the past eight years has guided UN Tourism with vision and commitment, strengthening its voice and global relevance. As we move forward, we do so in partnership with every Member State, honouring the unique vision each nation brings to this shared journey of growth, development, and prosperity.* ”

and global relevance,” she said. “As we move forward, we do so in partnership with every Member State, honouring the unique vision each nation brings to this shared journey of growth, development, and prosperity.”



“We must look beyond numbers to deeper impact, beyond growth alone to growth with purpose, and beyond commitments to sustainability to collective action that endures”

Tourism with Purpose

Outlining her strategic priorities, the incoming Secretary-General presented an ambitious yet grounded framework centred on responsibility, resilience and inclusivity. She stressed the need to redefine success in tourism beyond visitor numbers and revenue alone.

“We must look beyond numbers to deeper impact, beyond growth alone to growth with purpose, and beyond commitments to sustainability to collective action that endures,” she said.

She identified five shared priorities that will guide her administration:

1. Responsible tourism – ensuring growth aligns with social and environmental integrity.

2. Capacity building – empowering communities, youth and women through education and skills development.

3. Technology for good – leveraging innovation and digital tools to drive equitable transformation.

4. Innovative financing – mobilising resources to support inclusive and sustainable tourism growth.

5. Smart governance – strengthening transparent, accountable institutions that deliver lasting value.



An elated Shaikha Al Nowais after her confirmation at the General Assembly

A Message of Unity and Humanity

Throughout her speech, Shaikha Al Nowais emphasised the human essence of tourism – connection, hospitality and shared experience. She reminded delegates that tourism’s true impact lies in its ability to transform lives.

“Tourism connects not just destinations, but dreams,” she said. “It creates jobs, preserves heritage, empowers women and youth, and brings hope where it is needed most.”

She urged Member States to view her election as the beginning of a collective journey. “Let us remember this day not as the close of a campaign, but as the opening of a new chapter – one defined by collaboration, courage, and compassion.”



Secretary General Shaikha Al Nowais in a picture with the UAE delegation



Looking Ahead

Her message resonated strongly with delegates, many of whom regard her appointment as both a symbolic and strategic turning point for UN Tourism. As the organisation marks its 50th anniversary, her leadership is already shaping a renewed focus on innovation, sustainability and social inclusion.

Having officially assumed office on 1 January 2026, Shaikha Al Nowais now leads an organisation strengthened by reform and positioned to redefine global tourism in an increasingly complex world. Building on the foundations laid over the past decade, she is expected to steer UN Tourism towards a more inclusive, resilient and purpose-driven future.

"Let us build a tourism sector that serves humanity, protects our planet, and celebrates the beauty of every culture and every traveller's story," she said.

Her acceptance speech in Riyadh captured the spirit of this transition – from legacy to renewal, from leadership to collaboration, and from growth to purpose.



26th UN Tourism General Assembly in pictures



Zurab Pololikashvili, former UN Tourism Secretary-General



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



Executive Directors at UN Tourism



African women tourism ministers at the UN Tourism General Assembly



New UN Tourism report shows Africa as great potential for tourism investment and growth

Africa's tourism prospects received a major boost in Riyadh as UN Tourism unveiled its first-ever Regional Report on Tourism Investment Trends and Opportunities in Africa during the 26th UN Tourism General Assembly—offering the strongest evidence yet that the continent is fast emerging as a transformative frontier for global tourism investment and long-term growth.

The landmark publication presents Africa as a dynamic, fast-evolving marketplace where demographic strength, economic resilience and cultural diversity are converging to create unprecedented opportunities. Home to 1.5 billion people—60% under the age of 25—the continent is positioned to become one of the world's most influential tourism investment hubs, propelled by steady GDP growth of 3.2% in 2024 and deepening regional integration.

According to the new report, Africa attracted over USD 50 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2024 alone. Since 2019, the tourism sector has recorded USD 6.6 billion in 105 greenfield investment projects,

“**Bolstering tourism investment and supporting entrepreneurs across Africa has been one of the core priorities I sought to advance during my mandate. To this end, 7 country-specific guidebooks for South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Morocco, Mozambique, Mauritius and Tanzania have been published, with additional editions underway for Angola, Kenya, Ghana and Cabo Verde. Some were also translated into Chinese to target new market segments and attract investors from across the globe.**”

generating more than 15,100 direct jobs. Tourism now contributes nearly half of all services exports in Africa—the highest share globally—reflecting its rising strategic importance to national and regional economies.

The continent welcomed 74 million international tourists in 2024, earning USD 43 billion in tourism receipts, while tourism contributed 3.5% to Africa's GDP in 2023. As global travellers seek authentic, sustainable and culturally immersive experiences, Africa's tourism economy is rapidly diversifying, expanding beyond traditional products into high-growth niches such as MCCI (meetings, congresses, conventions and incentives), gastronomy, wellness, sports tourism, coastal and maritime experiences, and diaspora travel.

The report also underscores the varied but complementary strengths of Africa's subregions. North Africa is rising as a hub for integrated tourism zones and cultural heritage routes; Southern Africa blends mature safari markets with luxury and adventure experiences; East Africa leads in ecotourism and conservation finance; West Africa is gaining prominence through cultural, creative and diaspora-led tourism; and Central Africa—rich in biodiversity—remains one of the continent's most untapped frontiers.

However, the report does not overlook the challenges that continue to restrain Africa's tourism potential. Gaps in infrastructure, regulatory bottlenecks and persistent perceptions of risk remain obstacles to large-scale investment. Nonetheless, the tide is turning through targeted reforms, fiscal and non-fiscal incentives, emerging Tourism Special Economic Zones (TSEZs) and strengthened public-private-community partnerships. These developments, paired with rising investment in digital systems, transport, energy and social infrastructure, are laying the foundation for scalable, future-ready tourism projects.

UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili emphasised both the



strategic relevance of the report and the collaborative leadership behind it. While presenting the publication, he acknowledged South Africa's Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, as the original proponent of the idea to develop a continent-wide investment report—an initiative she championed within the Executive Council.

“Bolstering tourism investment and supporting entrepreneurs across Africa has been one of the core priorities I sought to advance during my mandate,” Pololikashvili stated. “To this end, 7 country-specific guidebooks for South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Morocco, Mozambique, Mauritius and Tanzania have been published, with additional editions underway for Angola, Kenya, Ghana and Cabo Verde. Some were also translated into Chinese to target new market segments and attract investors from across the globe.”

He added: “Building on the success of the UN Tourism Doing Business Guidelines series, we have produced a comprehensive Regional Tourism Investment Report for Africa which brings together the voices of both public and private stakeholders and highlights the immense potential and business opportunities the tourism sector offers in the continent.”

The launch marks a pivotal moment for Africa's tourism future, offering global investors a detailed roadmap to navigate the continent's rapidly expanding tourism economy—one brimming with opportunity, shaped by reform and ready for transformative growth.

27th UN Tourism General Assembly heads to the Dominican Republic in 2027



Carlos Peguero, Vice Minister of Tourism of the Dominican Republic speaking at the General Assembly

The Dominican Republic has officially been confirmed as the host of the 27th session of the UN Tourism General Assembly, set to take place in 2027. The decision was made during the just ended 26th General Assembly held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The Caribbean nation's bid to host the prestigious global tourism gathering received overwhelming support from Member States, following the required procedures outlined by UN Tourism. The Dominican Republic was the only country to formally submit a candidature to host the next Assembly.

According to UN Tourism, the Government of the Dominican Republic submitted its formal expression of interest to the Secretariat in November 2024. The candidature was later endorsed by at least 10% of Member States, with strong backing from the Regional Commission for the Americas during its 70th meeting in Lima, Peru, in August 2025.

In fulfilment of the organisation's hosting

requirements, the Dominican Republic pledged in writing to adhere to all legal frameworks governing UN Tourism meetings held outside its headquarters and to provide the necessary logistical and infrastructural support for the successful organisation of the 2027 Assembly.

Addressing the august assembly, the Vice Minister of Tourism of the Caribbean nation Carlos Peguero said, the government of Dominican Republic is not only warmly waiting to the host the tourism world but it's a testament and bold call by a country where tourism is the mainstay of its economy and over the years have promulgated initiatives to give expand the livelihoods of who depend on this industry.

The Dominican Minister of Tourism, David Collado, thanked the distinction and stressed the importance for his country to hold the event in this country.

“Hosting the UN Tourism's General

Assembly in 2027 is not just an achievement: it is a recognition of a management that transformed the way of tourism in the region,” Collado wrote on his social networks.

The official added that “the leadership of the Dominican Republic continues to grow in world tourism”.

The confirmation marks the first time the Dominican Republic will host the UN Tourism General Assembly, underscoring the country's growing prominence as a leading destination for sustainable tourism in the Americas.

The General Assembly, which convenes every two years, serves as the supreme organ of UN Tourism and brings together ministers, policymakers and industry leaders from across the world to shape the future of global tourism.

The 27th session in 2027 is expected to attract high-level participation and focus on advancing innovation, sustainability and inclusive growth across the global tourism sector.

UN Tourism moves to institutionalize Africa & Americas Summit as permanent platform for South-South cooperation

The recently concluded 26th UN Tourism General Assembly in Riyadh has taken a major step toward strengthening cooperation between Africa and the Americas with a proposal to institutionalize the UN Tourism Africa & Americas Summit (CAF-CAM) as a permanent biennial event on the organisation's official calendar.

The proposal, tabled by the Dominican Republic, seeks to formalize the CAF-CAM Summit as a high-level mechanism for political dialogue and structured collaboration between tourism authorities across the two regions. It also calls for the creation of a South-South Cooperation Mechanism, headquartered at the UN Tourism offices in Madrid, to ensure the effective follow-up of commitments and implementation of joint initiatives.

According to the document presented at the Assembly, the move aims to build on the momentum of the Punta Cana Declaration (2024) and the Livingstone Summit (2025), both of which underscored the need for a structured framework to transform tourism into a strategic tool for sustainable development across the Global South.

The proposed Mechanism will be responsible for coordinating successive editions of the CAF-CAM Summit, managing a bi-regional marketplace for technical cooperation, facilitating

agreements and promoting knowledge exchange and strategic partnerships among public and private sector actors, academia and civil society.

In recognition of its pioneering role in conceptualising and championing the platform, the Dominican Republic has been recommended as Honorary Founder of the CAF-CAM Summit, ensuring strategic continuity and political commitment to tourism integration between Africa and the Americas.

Once adopted, the CAF-CAM Summit will serve as an official biennial event, alternating between Africa and the Americas, to provide a space for ministers, policymakers and industry leaders to assess progress, discuss emerging challenges and align strategies for sustainable tourism growth.

The proposal envisions a rotating presidency every two years between the two regions to maintain balance and shared responsibility. The accompanying South-South Cooperation Mechanism will coordinate logistics, technical support and policy alignment, as well as mobilize resources and strengthen institutional capacities in both regions.

Key focus areas under the initiative include investment promotion, human capital development, digital transformation, sustainable tourism and cultural exchange. It also proposes the creation of an

Africa-Americas Investment Promotion Platform, designed to encourage cross-continental tourism investment flows and partnerships based on the UN Tourism "Doing Business Guidelines" framework.

Further, the proposal promotes workforce development and digital skills through cross-regional training, scholarships under the UN Tourism Online Academy, and entrepreneurship mentorship programmes for tourism innovators.

The initiative also aims to consolidate joint technical cooperation projects in areas such as connectivity, visa facilitation, smart destinations and social inclusion—issues highlighted as priorities during the previous summits.

With the third CAF-CAM Summit scheduled to take place in Brazil in 2026, the proposal represents a clear commitment to deepening bi-regional cooperation. If adopted, it would mark a historic milestone in the institutional evolution of UN Tourism's efforts to advance inclusive, resilient and innovative tourism across the Global South.

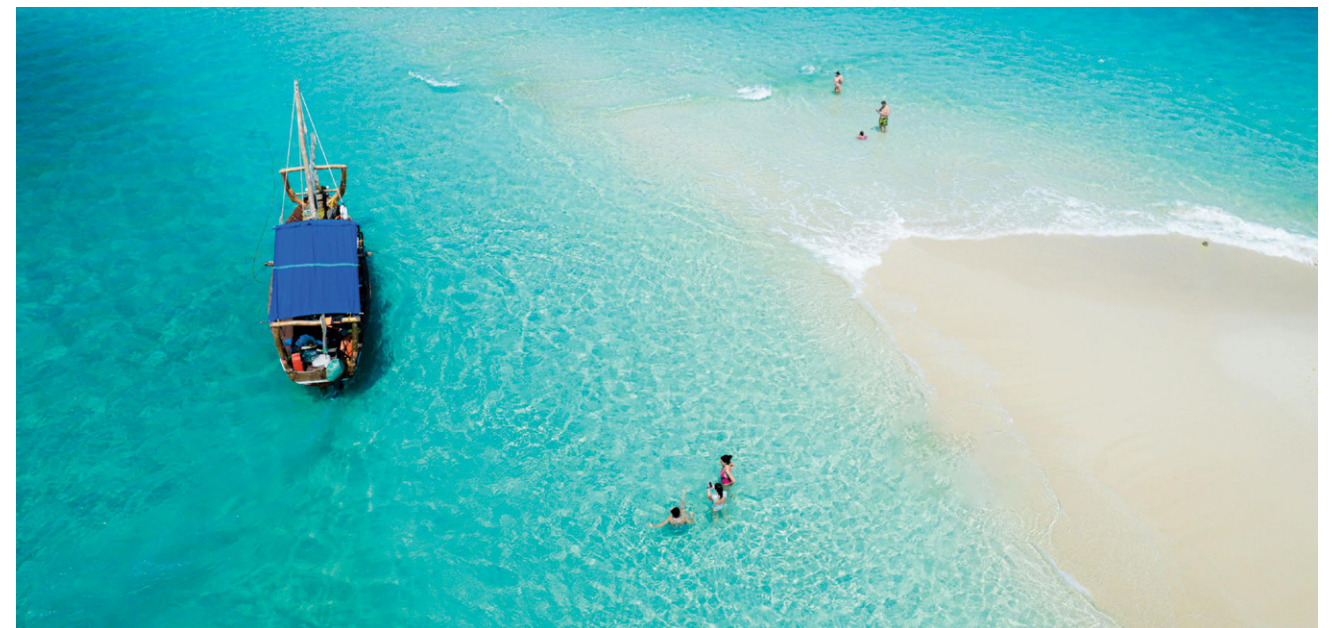
Ultimately, the institutionalization of the CAF-CAM Summit is expected to position Africa and the Americas as strategic partners in transforming tourism into a key driver of sustainable development, innovation and shared prosperity for both regions.



The Barefoot Luxury Experience in Zanzibar



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China to host new UN Tourism regional office in Shanghai

China has received the green light to host a new UN Tourism Regional Office in Shanghai, following deliberations at the 26th UN Tourism General Assembly in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The decision comes as part of the recommendations outlined in the working paper of the Working Group on UN Tourism Regional and Thematic Offices, which has been reviewing and improving the legal and operational framework for establishing such offices around the world.

According to the report presented during the Assembly, the Government of China's proposal to host the Regional Office was welcomed by Member States, with the Assembly authorising UN Tourism Secretary-General to collaborate with China in preparing the necessary legal, financial, and administrative arrangements.

The new Regional Office in Shanghai will operate under the guidelines of resolution 740(XXIV), which sets the standards for creating UN Tourism's Regional and Thematic Offices. The proposal received input from members of the Commission for East Asia and the Pacific (CAP) and the Commission for South Asia (CSA), whose comments will be incorporated into the next phase of consultations.

The Assembly invited the Secretary-General and the Government of China to hold further discussions with the CAP and CSA to finalise details before the proposal is submitted to the Executive Council for approval. Once confirmed, the Shanghai Regional Office will join the network of existing and upcoming UN Tourism offices aimed at strengthening cooperation, promoting sustainable tourism, and advancing



the organisation's global development agenda.

The move marks a significant step in UN Tourism's strategy to deepen its presence in Asia, recognising the region's growing role as a global tourism powerhouse.

Cabo Verde to host World Tourism Day in 2027



The 26th UN Tourism General Assembly has confirmed El Salvador and Cabo Verde as the official host countries for the 2026 and 2027 editions of World Tourism Day, respectively.

The announcements follow recommendations made by the UN Tourism Regional Commissions for the Americas and for Africa during the 123rd session of the Executive Council. El Salvador, endorsed by the Regional Commission for the Americas, will host the 2026 celebration, while Cabo Verde, backed by the African Commission, will take the lead in 2027.

Each year, World Tourism Day highlights

a key theme that reflects the industry's priorities and aspirations. For 2026, the theme "Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence to Redesign Tourism" will take centre stage. The focus will be on harnessing technology and artificial intelligence to reshape the global tourism landscape — from enhancing visitor experiences and improving operational efficiency to fostering sustainability through innovation.

In 2027, the theme "Transforming Tourism through Education" will guide discussions and activities. This theme underscores the critical role of education and skills development in shaping the future of tourism. It aims to promote capacity-building, community empowerment, and knowledge-sharing to ensure that tourism remains inclusive, sustainable, and beneficial to all.

Expressing appreciation to delegates, the Cabo Verde's Minister of Tourism and Transport, Dr. José Luís Sá Nogueira said "In 2027, Cape Verde will be the center stage of the celebrations promoted by UN Tourism, placing the country at the center of the debate and international projection on the future of tourism",

The country was also elected a member

of the World Committee on Ethics in Tourism (WCTE), a body established in 2003, responsible for interpreting, applying and monitoring "the provisions of the UN Tourism Global Code of Ethics".

"The Ministry of Tourism and Transport considers that Cape Verde's election represents recognition of its commitment to the principles of ethics, sustainability, inclusion and responsibility in tourism development," the Minister said.

Both host countries — El Salvador and Cabo Verde — are expected to showcase their cultural heritage, tourism development initiatives, and innovative approaches to sustainable travel as they welcome global leaders, policymakers, and industry players for the annual celebrations.

World Tourism Day, celebrated each year on 27 September, serves as a platform to raise awareness of tourism's social, cultural, political, and economic value. The upcoming editions promise to spotlight how technology and education can serve as powerful tools in driving the continued transformation of the tourism industry worldwide.

Seychelles Tourism & Culture Minister lays out vision for authentic, sustainable growth

At the recently concluded 26th UN Tourism General Assembly in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles' newly appointed Minister for Tourism and Culture, Amanda Bernstein, made her debut appearance on the global tourism stage—barely a week after assuming office. In a conversation with VoyagesAfriq on the sidelines of the event, Bernstein shared her excitement about her new role, her vision for Seychelles' tourism future and the centrality of culture and sustainability to her agenda.

"It is very much a baptism of fire, but it's the best way to start any new job and any new area of work," she said with enthusiasm. "I'm very excited to have been here to really get immediately immersed in the topics at hand."

Bernstein described her appointment as "an absolute privilege," adding that it is a rare opportunity to make a meaningful impact. "It's one of those opportunities in life that presents itself and you think, OK, I can add value here. I really have an opportunity to do something for my community, for my country and it's a humbling experience to go through that," she said.

The Minister underscored that the merging of the tourism and culture portfolios reflects a deliberate move by the Seychelles government to position culture as the heartbeat of the island nation's tourism offering. "Our culture is at the very centre of all that we are and all that we're doing," she explained. "It is the essence of the Creole Seychellois people, and it is a very important component of our tourism sector."

She stressed that sustainability and authenticity would drive her leadership approach. "We need to offer more. Our travellers want more and they want real authenticity and that's what we can offer through culture—preserving it for our own future generations, but also sharing it with the world," she said.

As one of the seven women serving in the Seychelles cabinet—comprising about 52% female representation—Bernstein expressed pride in being part of a progressive government that values



women's contributions. "It is a very proud moment for us to stand as Seychelles women together on this strong cabinet to really bring a strong and committed agenda for our country," she noted.

She hopes her appointment will inspire young women to take up leadership roles. "You have something to offer, you have experience, you have a voice. And when you have the opportunity to help elevate and lift up your entire community, you take it," she emphasised.

For Bernstein, empowering youth and women in the tourism industry is a key focus. "We want to grow tourism as a vehicle for development and progress in our community, as a sector for viable, long careers for our young people and our women," she added.

For the foreseeable future, the Minister plans to promote Seychelles beyond its famed beaches by highlighting its cultural richness. "Celebrating different aspects of our culture and our heritage is going to add to the rich tapestry of experience for our visitors," she stated.

She hinted at plans to elevate events such as the Festival Kreol to international prominence. "Yes, it's about putting some of our cultural events and our cultural experiences on the agenda, on the calendar for international visitors as well," she said. "We have some of the best food out there, and it should not be a well-kept secret."

As Seychelles returns to the UN Tourism Executive Council, Bernstein reaffirmed her country's leadership in sustainable tourism. "Sustainability is central to everything—for longevity and protecting the sector and everybody who is involved in it and their livelihoods," she remarked.

She also emphasised the importance of building human capital through education and training. "We are very keen to work on growing the education and the skills of our communities and our people," she said. "There's cooperation and partnerships that I think will benefit from some of our experience sharing."

Bernstein confirmed that the government is reviewing the structure of the Seychelles Tourism Board to align with the new policy direction. "The president was very clear that we have to look at the Seychelles Tourism Board. These are the conversations that we start having with key partners and experts to see what we need to adjust and what we bring forward," she disclosed.

The Minister also welcomed the private sector's support for her appointment. "It's been very encouraging. I've had a lot of very generous well-wishes," she said. "I'm very excited to get onto the ground and start meeting with people in the private sector and hearing their perspectives."



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Professor Marcelle Ibinga Épse Itsitsa named Gabon's Minister of Sustainable Tourism and Handicrafts....

Professor Marcelle Ibinga Épse Itsitsa has been named Minister of Sustainable Tourism and Handicrafts in the new government announced by President Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema on New Year's Day, marking a high-profile appointment in the administration's efforts to harness Gabon's cultural and natural assets for economic development.

The cabinet reshuffle, part of the government unveiled on 1 January 2026, follows legislative and local elections in late 2025 and underscores President Oligui Nguema's ongoing reorganisation of ministerial portfolios. The new line-up comprises 31 ministers tasked with driving priorities that include economic diversification and sustainable growth.

Professor Ibinga Itsitsa, a seasoned academic and former minister in other government portfolios, now heads the portfolio responsible for promoting Gabon's tourism industry in a sustainable manner while strengthening the handicrafts sector. Local reports

highlight that her appointment comes at a critical juncture as Gabon seeks to leverage its rich biodiversity, protected forests, national parks, scenic coastlines and vibrant cultural heritage to boost tourism and create jobs.

Commenting on her appointment, Professor Ibinga Itsitsa expressed deep appreciation for the confidence placed in her:

"With strength and humility, I wish to express my profound gratitude to His Excellency Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema President of the Republic, Head of State, Head of Government, for the confidence placed in my humble self through my appointment to the position of Minister of Sustainable Tourism and Handicrafts. I approach this lofty responsibility with humility, dedication, determination and a keen sense of duty for results. I commit myself to work, in close collaboration with all public and private actors, to develop sustainable, inclusive and value-creating tourism for our country."



Her commitment signals a policy focus on inclusive development in a sector that bridges conservation and economic opportunity. Professor Ibinga Itsitsa has previously served in several senior roles, including as Minister of the Public Service and Civil Service Capacity Building, and she brings to her new role both administrative experience and an academic background.

UN Tourism Confirms Marina Novelli as New Chair of the World Committee on Tourism Ethics

The UN Tourism General Assembly has confirmed the appointment of Professor Marina Novelli as the new Chair of the World Committee on Tourism Ethics. Professor Novelli's nomination was approved by Member States during the Assembly, marking the beginning of her four-year term as Chair.

Professor Novelli is an acknowledged expert in tourism and international development and serves as the Director of the Sustainable Travel and Tourism Advanced Research Centre at Nottingham University Business School.

She brings extensive experience in sustainable tourism policy, planning, and development, all grounded in ethical principles and practices. In her role, she will lead the Committee's work to actively promote responsible,

sustainable, and universally accessible tourism. She will also oversee the implementation of the UN Tourism Global Code of Ethics for Tourism and provide guidance on ethical issues in tourism.

"It is a great honor to be entrusted with this role," said Professor Novelli. "Together with the Committee members, I look forward to advancing ethical principles that ensure tourism continues to be a force for good—benefiting people, communities, and the planet."

UN Tourism Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili, congratulated Professor Novelli on her appointment, stating: "With her deep and diverse expertise and strong commitment to ethical and sustainable tourism, Professor Novelli will guide the Committee's efforts to ensure the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism remains a living instrument shaping the future of our sector."





UN Tourism welcomes G20 Leaders recognition and strong support for tourism under South Africa's G20 Presidency

G20 Leaders have recognized the contribution of tourism to shared prosperity and sustainability at the first Summit held in Africa under the Presidency of South Africa.

The G20 South Africa Summit: Leaders' Declaration includes an important set of commitments to advance tourism as a key driver of inclusive and sustainable development with a focus on:

Integrating tourism in national development strategies

Promoting innovation and Investment

Enhancing air connectivity, market access and new routes

Supporting the digitalization of tourism start-ups and MSMEs

Unlocking financing for sustainable tourism

Creating opportunities for youth, women, people in vulnerable situations, local communities and Indigenous Peoples

Developing inclusive and sustainable tourism practices

Mobilizing public-private capital for sustainability alignment investment, and

UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili says: "The G20 economies represent around 70% of international tourism, and so this clear recognition of our sector's importance to shared prosperity and sustainability is hugely welcome. We are particularly

encouraged to see G20 Leaders intent to work on more and better connectivity between destinations, accelerating innovation and the shift to digital, ensuring the sector leaves no one behind and placing tourism in national development strategies. Great strides were made by South Africa's G20 Presidency. I would like to congratulate HE President Cyril Ramaphosa for an outstanding Presidency, the first in Africa, and Minister Patricia DeLille for her leadership in the tourism track."

The G20 economies represent around 70% of international tourism, and so this clear recognition of our sector's importance to shared prosperity and sustainability is hugely welcome

In the Declaration, G20 Leaders highlight their "strong support for tourism innovation and investment, enhancing air connectivity, expanding market access, opening more routes, promoting sustainability, aviation safety and security while ensuring fair competition and policy coordination, facilitating people-to-people contacts and developing inclusive, sustainable tourism practices, as well as advancing digital innovation to enhance travel and tourism start-ups and MSMEs."

G20 Leaders further commit to work to "promote and expand opportunities for youth, women, people in vulnerable situations, local communities and Indigenous Peoples, as appropriate, with a practical and evidence-based approach."

They "emphasize the importance of integrating tourism into national development strategies and the need to unlock financing for sustainable tourism. We call for the mobilization of public-private capital through transparent, predictable, and sustainability-aligned investment environments.

UN Tourism as South Africa G20 Presidency Knowledge Partner

UN Tourism is honored to have worked with the South African G20 Presidency as a Knowledge Partner and contributed to the discussions at the Tourism Working Group and the Tourism Ministers Meeting held last September.

Last September, Tourism Ministers gathered in Mpumalanga committed to advancing policies that foster a sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism sector, namely in terms of:

- Digital innovation to enhance travel and tourism start-ups and MSME
- Tourism financing and investment to enhance equality and promote sustainable development
- Air Connectivity for Seamless Travel
- Enhancing resilience for inclusive, sustainable tourism development

The G20 represents around 70% of all international tourist arrivals and exports from tourism.

Tourism accounts for 3.1% of the total GDP of the G20, 5% of all exports, and 21% of all service exports



WTTC selects Madrid as location for new global office

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) today announced that its Operating Committee has unanimously approved Spain (Madrid) in Spain as the location for the organisation's new Global Office, which will help deliver tangible value to members and ignite the sector's growth potential.

Five destinations expressed interest in hosting the Global Office – Dubai (UAE), France, Italy, Spain and Switzerland – with the evaluation criteria based on six areas: office rental and operating costs; the tax, incentives and competitive environment; fast-track visas and work permit frameworks in the destination; government support; cost of living to attract and retain talent; and proximity to international organisations.

The decision to choose the Spanish city of Madrid was endorsed by all 17 members of WTTC's Operating Committee, following a comprehensive assessment of WTTC's long-term strategic and operational needs.

Members agreed that Spain (Madrid) offered the most attractive option due to the city's competitiveness, a more favourable tax environment, government support, easier visa processing for employees and overall lower operating costs. Challenges linked to Brexit, such

as constraints on talent mobility, made the UK less attractive as WTTC wishes to further build its leadership position and become even more agile in the sector.

Establishing an office in Spain (Madrid) gives WTTC immediate access to a significantly broader and more diverse talent pool, encompassing nearly 350 million qualified professionals across the region, as well as proximity to international organisations, enabling structured collaboration.

The city was also selected for its strong international connectivity via Madrid-Barajas Airport, competitive business environment, incentives from government, synergies with international organisations in the sector such as UN Tourism and alignment with WTTC's global mission. The new office will form a central part of WTTC's worldwide network, supporting its highly-respected advocacy, research and member engagement activities across the globe.

Manfredi Lefebvre, Chairman of WTTC, said: "The unanimous decision to establish our Global Office in Spain (Madrid) reflects a clear view among the Operating Committee about what WTTC needs to succeed in the years

ahead. This move ensures we operate more efficiently, deliver more value to our members, access the best global talent and maintain a truly international outlook, strongly supported by the Spanish government. 2026 will be a year in which we will reshape WTTC so it is focused on its members, stronger research capability and deeper government advocacy in the travel and tourism sector."

Gloria Guevara, interim President and CEO, WTTC, added: "We'd like to thank the government of Spain for their support during this process to create the new WTTC Global Office. Spain has prioritised travel and tourism and clearly understands the enormous contribution the sector makes to global growth. Being based in a competitive city like Madrid, Spain, will help WTTC go from strength to strength, offer closer engagement with our members worldwide and enable us to play a major role advising on good policy development, investments that help tourism growth and job creation from our members which have global impact. I'd also like to thank the other countries that expressed interest in hosting WTTC's new Global Office – France, Italy, Switzerland and Dubai (UAE). We are humbled by their proposals and the huge interest shown by governments worldwide."

AFRICA IN 2026:

Ten Places, Four Ways to Travel Differently

Beach. Gastronomy. Culture. Wildlife.

By Francis Doku

Africa no longer waits to be interpreted. It moves at its own pace, on its own terms, and in 2026 it does so with a quiet confidence that seasoned travellers immediately recognise. The continent is not performing for visitors anymore. It is simply living – and inviting you to step into that rhythm.

There has been a subtle but important shift in how Africa is being experienced. The language of discovery has softened. In its place is something more mature – a desire to engage, to understand, to linger. Travellers are asking better questions now. They want meals that come with stories, beaches that still feel human, wildlife encounters that respect space, and cities that refuse to flatten themselves for easy consumption.

African destinations, too, are more self-assured. Food cultures are stepping forward without dilution. Conservation models are becoming more ethical and community-driven. Culture is being

presented as lived reality, not staged performance. Even the most familiar places feel newly grounded, as though they are finally being allowed to be themselves.

The ten destinations that follow are not a ranking, nor a declaration of the “best”. They are simply places that, in 2026, feel aligned with how Africa wants to be travelled – thoughtfully, curiously and without unnecessary noise.

BEACH: Where the Continent Slows the Clock

Seychelles – Beauty That Does Not Compete

Seychelles does not need reinvention. Its appeal lies in restraint. Beaches unfold gently, framed by sculpted granite and impossibly clear water. Luxury here is quiet, deliberate and unshowy.

In 2026, Seychelles continues to lead Africa’s island narrative through

sustainability, intimacy and cultural authenticity. Creole traditions sit comfortably alongside refined hospitality, and the islands reward travellers who are content to do less and feel more.

Key attraction: An unrivalled combination of pristine beaches, marine biodiversity, discreet sustainability-led luxury, and renowned walking trails.

Zanzibar, Tanzania – An Island That Remembers

Zanzibar carries history lightly, but never invisibly. Stone Town’s doors and alleyways speak of centuries of exchange, while the beaches along the north and east coast invite a different kind of attention – one rooted in rest and reflection.

As wellness travel and boutique hospitality grow in 2026, Zanzibar remains one of Africa’s most complete



island experiences, offering both narrative depth and coastal ease with herbs and spices to spice up your stay.

Key attraction: The seamless blend of Stone Town’s Swahili-Arab heritage with palm-lined Indian Ocean beaches and spices.

Bazaruto Archipelago, Mozambique – The Luxury of Distance

Bazaruto is defined by space. Space between islands, space in the sky, space to breathe. The beaches are wide and unforced, the sea alive with colour and movement.

Still largely untouched, Bazaruto represents a version of African beach travel that feels increasingly rare – remote, elemental and quietly powerful.

Key attraction: Remote island beaches paired with world-class diving and some of the most untouched seascapes in Africa and seafood to die for.

GASTRONOMY: Where Identity Is Served, Not Styled

Sierra Leone – A Culinary Voice Stepping Forward

In 2026, Sierra Leone takes its place on Africa’s gastronomic map as host of the UN Tourism Africa Gastronomy Forum, and it does so without theatrics. This is food rooted in land, water and memory.

Along the Freetown Peninsula, seafood arrives fresh and simply prepared. Dishes like cassava leaf stew and smoked fish carry generations of knowledge. Sierra Leone’s food culture does not seek reinvention – it seeks recognition, and rightly so.

Key attraction: A deeply rooted food culture showcased on the continental stage through the UN Tourism Africa Gastronomy Forum 2026.

Marrakech, Morocco – The Discipline of Tradition

Marrakech understands that flavour

is built slowly. Spices are measured, recipes respected, rituals preserved. Whether eating from a stall in the medina or dining in a courtyard riad, food here feels intentional.

In 2026, Marrakech remains one of Africa’s most immersive culinary destinations precisely because it resists unnecessary modernisation.

Key attraction: Centuries-old culinary traditions expressed through markets, riads and ritualised Moroccan dining.

Dakar, Senegal – Confidence Without Performance

Dakar cooks with assurance. Atlantic seafood, bold seasoning and iconic dishes like thieboudienne define a city that feeds people well and without fuss.

As culinary tourism grows across the continent, Dakar stands out for its consistency and integrity – a food city that knows exactly who it is.

Key attraction: Atlantic-driven cuisine anchored by UNESCO endorsed thieboudienne and a strong farm-and-sea-to-table culture.

CULTURE: Where History Still Speaks

Accra and Cape Coast, Ghana – Movement and Memory

Accra pulses with creativity – music, fashion, art and ideas moving confidently forward. Cape Coast slows the pace, insisting on remembrance. Together, they form one of West Africa’s most meaningful cultural journeys.

In 2026, Ghana continues to demonstrate that celebration and reflection are not opposites, but companions.

Key attraction: A powerful cultural corridor linking contemporary African creativity with transatlantic historical memory.



Cairo, Egypt – Monumental and Unfinished

Cairo overwhelms by scale alone. With the Grand Egyptian Museum redefining how ancient history is experienced, Egypt continues to shape global cultural tourism.

The Grand Egyptian Museum is an archaeological and national museum located about 2 kilometres from the Giza Pyramid Complex, in Giza, Egypt. Dedicated to Ancient Egypt and its culture, society, and artifacts, it is the largest museum in the world for a single civilization.

What makes Cairo compelling in 2026 is its refusal to exist only in the past. It is layered, noisy, alive – and still astonishing.

Key attraction: Unparalleled ancient heritage reinterpreted through the Grand Egyptian Museum and modern cultural infrastructure.



WILDLIFE: Where Control Ends

Okavango Delta, Botswana – Abundance Without Excess

The Okavango remains one of the world's most extraordinary ecosystems. Water moves against logic, wildlife thrives without spectacle, and silence becomes part of the experience.

In 2026, conservation-first tourism ensures that the Delta remains intimate, ethical and deeply affecting.

Key attraction: A unique inland delta offering low-impact, high-integrity wildlife encounters in a pristine ecosystem.



Kenya – From the Masai Mara to Amboseli

Kenya's wildlife story unfolds best across landscapes. In the Masai Mara, the Great Migration delivers drama on a grand scale. In Amboseli, elephants move slowly beneath Mount Kilimanjaro, offering moments of quiet awe.

Together, these destinations reveal the breadth of Kenya's natural heritage and a growing commitment to community-centred conservation.

Key attraction: A multi-landscape safari experience combining the drama of the Great Migration with iconic elephant herds beneath Mount Kilimanjaro.

CROSSOVER: When a City Refuses Categories

Cape Town, South Africa – Where Everything Collides

Cape Town refuses to behave neatly. It is ocean and mountain, vineyard and city, beauty and discomfort. In 2026, it remains Africa's most visually striking and emotionally layered urban destination.

Food is where the city's confidence is most visible. From fine dining shaped by global technique to deeply local flavours informed by migration and memory, Cape Town is Africa's most complete culinary city. Add the winelands, the coastline, and a design-led hospitality scene, and the experience becomes multidimensional.

Yet Cape Town's cultural power lies in its refusal to sanitise its past. Robben Island,



District Six and ongoing conversations around identity ensure that this is not a city you simply consume. It asks you to pay attention. That complexity is precisely why Cape Town belongs everywhere – and nowhere – all at once.

Key attraction: Africa's most complete crossover city, combining gastronomy, wine, coastline, design and complex cultural history.

A Conclusion That Tells the Truth

Africa does not offer completion. It offers perspective. You do not finish Africa – you pause within it.

In 2026, travelling the continent well means resisting the urge to rush, collect or conquer. It means allowing places to

shape you in small, persistent ways. A meal that lingers longer than expected. A landscape that rearranges your sense of scale. A moment of silence that feels unfamiliar, then necessary.

These ten places are not endpoints. They are thresholds. Each one invites you to step beyond certainty and into something more honest. Africa does not simplify itself for comfort, and that is its gift.

Long after the journey ends, something remains unsettled – a feeling that travel can still matter, that the world is larger and less predictable than itineraries suggest.

Africa does not demand that you return. It simply knows that you will.



Flying Carpet Travel Partners with NTOs to Elevate Destination Marketing Across Africa

Flying Carpet Travel, the unique one-stop destination discovery and booking portal, promoted by the founders of AirlinePros International, has unveiled a major upgrade to its digital destination marketing platform. The new feature 'Aladdin's World' is an initiative designed to empower national tourism organizations with the tools they need to showcase their destinations more effectively in an increasingly competitive global market. Aladdin's World supports NTO efforts to provide relevant and unique destination information and helps travellers discover curated destination content and exclusive experiences.

With the launch of Aladdin's World, Flying Carpet Travel successfully positions itself as a next-generation discovery and booking hub, offering visitors access to more than 400 flight options, 300,000 hotels, 400,000 activities, as well as airport transfers and travel insurance. Its intuitive interface is tailored to simplify travel planning while giving destinations greater visibility and control over how their products are presented.

A Platform Built for Evolving Tourism Needs

The launch took centre stage at the AirlinePros International General Assembly, a four-day gathering held in Cape Town, South Africa. The



event brought together members of AirlinePros International and Flying Carpet Travel offices from nearly 100 global offices, aviation and tourism leaders, and media professionals to explore pressing industry themes from sustainability and artificial intelligence to visa facilitation and sector-wide resilience.

"We are here to help National Tourism Organizations and destinations fully leverage digital tools to reach modern-day travellers," said Achma Asokan, Group CEO, introducing the platform and its many features. The upgraded platform was described as 'nuanced and bespoke' built not only to showcase a destination's offerings but to equip

NTOs with backend management capabilities ensuring they can own, control, and customize their digital presence.

Zambia has become the first destination to be onboarded onto the platform. During the assembly, Asokan presented a live demonstration of the system in action. Namibia, Botswana, Antigua & Barbuda, and Sao Paulo are among other destinations which are also in the process of signing up, gaining access to a modern online channel that highlights regional experiences while connecting travellers directly with local accommodations, activities, and curated itineraries.

UN Tourism Highlights Africa's Rising Momentum

In a keynote address at the AirlinePros International Assembly, Elcia Grandcourt, UN Tourism's Regional Director for Africa, outlined the organization's initiatives aimed at shaping tourism into a genuine force for good. She highlighted programs such as Best Tourism Villages, "Travel, Enjoy Respect" – designed to preserve

to raise awareness of the value and contribution that sustainable tourism can make towards development. Grandcourt also shared encouraging insights from the latest UN Tourism World Tourism Barometer, noting that Africa continues to rank among the world's top-performing regions. While the continent still represents just over 5% of global arrivals, recovery has been exceptionally strong.

"The African continent witnessed the strongest performance globally, with a 12% increase in international arrivals between January and June 2025 compared to the same period last year," Grandcourt noted. Morocco, Eswatini, South Africa, Tunisia, and Ethiopia emerged as the top performing destinations in early 2025.

With global tourism now fully rebounding from the disruption caused by the COVID, Africa's momentum signals a new chapter – one marked by innovation, collaboration, and a renewed focus on responsible growth.

NTA's support of the platform.....

The five National and regional tourism heads and other allied partners at the assembly applauded the initiative of Airline pros to support the destinations and enhancing it's market access and visibility to a rich market audience. The

CEO of the Zambia Tourism Agency, Matongo Matawamdi said

Chicalu Sebulon of the Namibia tourism board applied the assertion of his Zambian counterpart on the importance of building partnerships with entities such as Airlinepros and it's partners.



Seychelles Nature Trail set to return for Third edition on 16 May 2026

Following the resounding success of its second edition held last August, Tourism Seychelles announces the return of the Seychelles Nature Trail (SNT) for a third edition, scheduled to take place on 16th May 2026 on the island of Mahé.

The event, which has quickly established itself as one of the international highlights on Seychelles' sporting and experiential tourism calendar, once again promises to showcase the island's breathtaking nature.

Like in the previous editions, the 2026 race promises runners a high-energy 22 km challenge, featuring a demanding 1,210m elevation gain across some of Mahé's most striking natural landscapes. Runners will set off from Port Glaud, navigating a spectacular route through Cap Ternay, Anse Major, Mare aux Cochons, Cassedent, and Tomassin, before powering toward the finish at Grand Anse. The race blends coastline, forest, and mountain terrain—technical, and is suited to all levels.

The Seychelles Nature trail continues to champion sports tourism and celebrate Seychelles' unmatched biodiversity, offering runners an immersive journey



through some of the archipelago's natural parks.

Speaking about the event, Ms Bernadette Honoré, Senior Marketing Executive for the Réunion and Indian Ocean Market at Tourism Seychelles, explained that the Seychelles Nature Trail is designed to attract international, regional, and local trail runners, while also inspiring Seychellois athletes to

embrace the sport and discover the country's wild beauty up close.

"The Seychelles Nature Trail is a powerful showcase of our islands' granitic attributes and a key driver in positioning Seychelles as a premier nature and sport tourism destination. This edition once again features one of our most diverse routes, combining athletic intensity with amazing picture-perfect scenery."

She highlighted the growing international appeal of the Seychelles Nature Trail, noting that nearly one-third of participants in the most recent edition were international runners from Asia, Africa, and Europe. She added that international partners have provided overwhelmingly positive feedback, further strengthening the event's reputation on the global trail-running circuit.

"In response to this rising interest, we are launching the call for participation early, giving runners from around the world ample time to plan their travel and secure their place," she said.

Trail enthusiasts are invited to register and secure their spot for the Seychelles Nature Trail 2026 by visiting





DISCOVER NAMIBIA





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13. Sossus Dune Lodge
14. Sesriem Campsite
15. Naukluft Camp
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SIERRA LEONE'S QUIET TOURISM RENAISSANCE

Culture, Community and Confidence on the Global Stage

As the global tourism industry convenes in Madrid for FITUR, destinations are not only competing for arrivals, but for confidence, partnerships and long-term investment. For African tourism markets, this moment is especially significant. Beyond recovery, the conversation has shifted towards positioning, differentiation and sustainability. Sierra Leone arrives at FITUR at a time when its tourism story is evolving from potential to purpose.

Once viewed primarily through the lens of post-conflict recovery, Sierra Leone is steadily redefining its place within Africa's tourism landscape. In recent years, the country has prioritised culture, community-led tourism, heritage preservation and creative expression as strategic pillars for growth. 2025, in particular, marked a turning point, with increased international visibility through festivals, ecotourism initiatives, diaspora engagement and a renewed emphasis on women and youth participation in the tourism value chain.

At the heart of this repositioning is the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, led by Minister Nabeela Farida Tunis. In this interview for the FITUR edition of VoyagesAfriq Travel Magazine, the Minister outlines Sierra Leone's tourism priorities, reflects on lessons from recent reforms, and shares how the destination is engaging the global travel trade to unlock investment, build partnerships and shape a sustainable tourism future beyond arrivals.]

• How would you describe Sierra Leone's Tourism Sector in 2025?

NT: By every estimation, 2025 was a hugely defining moment in the Tourism industry, the year that, in my view, things really started taking shape. To have a clear understanding on why that is, you must take into context that, because of the chains of shocks that significantly impacted the tourism sector, Sierra Leone is, as I will describe it, the "new kid on the block".

That is why I initiated the Tourism for All campaign in 2024, a sustained drive that relied on nationwide tours and mass sensitization to redirect citizens' attention to the value of tourism. That campaign naturally led to the Year of Ecotourism, last year's theme. In that year, we doubled down on inclusivity, fostered a sense of collective ownership of our environment, and witnessed an uptick in tourism infrastructure.

So in simple terms, I would describe the tourism sector in 2025 as more inclusive, more self-aware, structured,



more adaptive to shocks, and most importantly, more responsive to the needs of travelers.

• What were the key highlights of the Destination?

2025 was a defined by a range of highlights, too many itemise but I will state a few:

- Gola-Tiwai Complex was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the first of such sites in Sierra Leone.
- The Restoration of Old Fourah Bay College (Ongoing) – the structure that first housed the First University in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- The Construction of three touristic sites courtesy of the world bank's Sierra Leone economic Diversification Project (SLEDP).
- The fashion with inclusion event where we featured models who are members of SLAPWA and raised funds to support their participation in the Mr and Ms Albinism Africa. Sierra Leone won the Miss Albinism Africa and will host the next continental event.
- The One Nation Reggae Festival – a first-of-its kind reggae festival that brought together national artists and about seven artists from the

“ So in simple terms, I would describe the tourism sector in 2025 as more inclusive, more self-aware, structured, more adaptive to shocks, and most importantly, more responsive to the needs of travelers. ”

Caribbean on the same stage, under the banner of unity and one love. History, vibes, culture, creativity – all rolled into one!

• You've been an active Chairperson of UN Tourism's WITLAC Committee, can you share with us what you would describe as the highlight in 2025 and the plans for 2026?

- We collaborated with the University of South Africa to train 100 women on entrepreneurship (market access and visibility) for sustainable tourism and event management.
- We also conducted in person stakeholder trainings in the districts
- On a personal note I continued my mentorship with young girls providing beyond educational support and aftercare.

• The year concluded with the One Nation Reggae Festival, beyond the entertainment cultural exchange, what is Destination Sierra Leone looking to achieve with this festival

NT: Interesting question. You see, I always get a little too excited when discussing the One Nation Reggae Festival, considering its overwhelming success.

But to answer your question, I would say the primary intent, barring the entertainment and cultural exchange sides to it, was to roll out a bridge to countries with whom we share similar historical contexts. We were also motivated by a real desire to reclaim Sierra Leone's position within the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

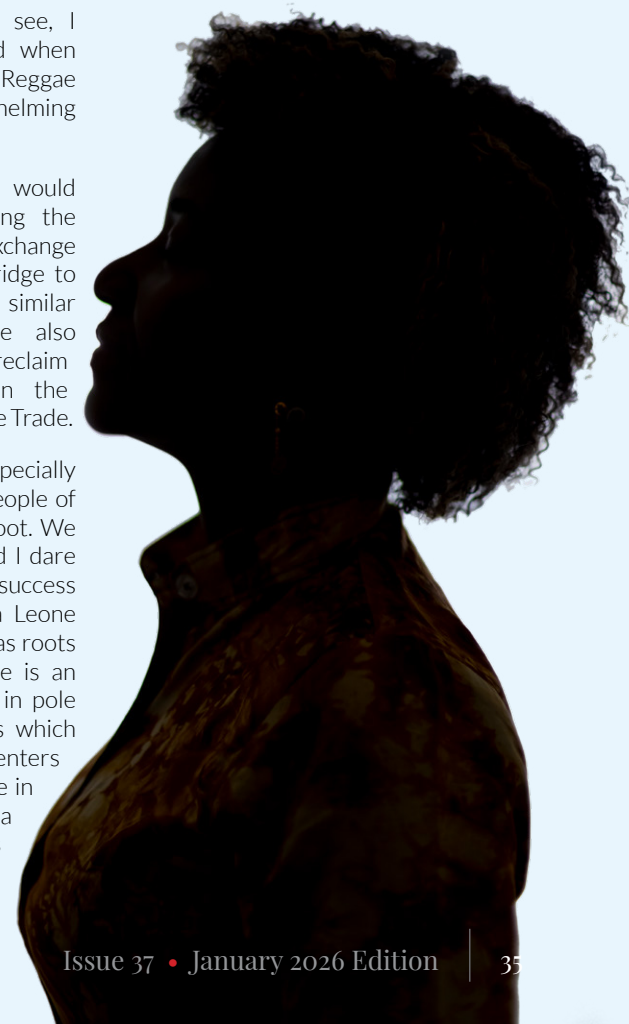
This is intentional on our part, especially in light of discussions around people of African descents tracing their root. We wanted to use the festival – and I dare say we achieved considerable success – to attract attention to Sierra Leone as the first point of call in so far as roots tracing is concerned. And there is an intriguing fact which places us in pole position: unlike other countries which also served as transit points or centers of slavery, Sierra Leone is unique in the sense that we functioned as a critical transit point of slaves as

well as the home of newly emancipated Africans. This is symbolic of the active presence of Sierra Leone in the struggle and renewal of black people around the world. That was the message we intended to pass through the One Nation Reggae Festival, and I thank my team for pulling it off, despite the odds.

• What is the theme for your Ministry for 2026?

NT: The Year of Culture and Creativity. With the two previous campaign creating the awareness of the significance of tourism and with the impetus created, we have pivoted to the culture and creative space. Well, to be honest, any careful observer would have easily predicted this year's theme, as there are clear parallels between the theme for this year and the previous year – they all logically link to the other.

This year seeks to affirm the centrality of culture and creativity to national cohesion and inclusive economic growth, while shedding light on the role of people, traditions and creative skills in shaping our future.



NTB unveils strategic framework to strengthen competitiveness and accelerate sector recovery

Namibia is moving from recovery to deliberate expansion, anchored by a five-year strategy, strengthened airline partnerships, and a concerted push to widen market reach. Institutional reforms at the Namibia Tourism Board (NTB), targeted product development, and a new Air Connect Namibia forum are central to a coordinated plan to convert visibility into sustainable arrivals and higher visitor spend.

Since assuming office last year, the Chief Executive Officer of the Namibia Tourism Board Sebulon Chicalu has prioritized institutional realignment, completing an integrated five-year business strategy and the annual plan for the next financial year. These documents frame a focused agenda intended to translate policy into measurable outcomes, including clearer governance, improved data systems and enhanced stakeholder engagement. As CEO Chicalu Sebulon put it, "We have cleared legacy issues so we can now move with purpose, our strategy is about building institutional capacity that answers stakeholder needs, and delivering results."

Sebulon outlined five strategic pillars: strengthen institutional capacity and stakeholder collaboration, improve tourism statistics and analytics, invest in operator capacity building, amplify Namibia's global visibility, and accelerate product development while ensuring sustainable management of key attractions. The new emphasis on empirical decision-making is deliberate. "Data must guide our decisions, we cannot build markets on impressions," he said, signaling a shift toward evidence-based marketing and investment prioritization.

Namibia intends to preserve established markets in Europe while actively opening new source markets to smooth seasonality and broaden demand. The NTB's market mix now includes North America and Canada, India, China, and emerging European markets such as Poland and the Czech Republic, alongside continued focus on Germany and the UK. Sebulon explained that diversifying markets helps "fill up the gaps in terms of seasonality," and

supports more consistent inbound flows across the year.

Product development is central to this approach. The NTB plans a programme of hosted farm and educational familiarization trips, designed to connect tour operators and buyers directly with Namibia's attractions, from the Skeleton Coast to Twyfelfontein and the adventure offerings in Swakopmund. These initiatives aim to convert interest into sellable itineraries, while managing destination capacity and the visitor experience.

Improving air access is a cornerstone of the strategy. The NTB has launched Air Connect Namibia, a coordination forum led by the Namibia Airports Company to engage international carriers on route development, co-marketing and market activation. Recent commercial developments include Discover adding Munich to its portfolio and Fly Namibia expanding regional links, while discussions continue with several carriers about new international routes.

A notable partnership with Ethiopian Airlines will increase frequencies, expanding Namibia's reach into the carrier's broader network and supporting trade activation through familiarization visits. "Ethiopian's increased frequencies will give us reach into markets we need to convert, and their partnership on fam trips will directly support trade activation," Sebulon said. The government-supported plan for a national carrier, Namibia Air, remains part of the medium-term connectivity landscape, with potential to further enhance direct seat capacity within 24 months.

Namibia's recent external recognition, including inclusion in Lonely Planet's top destinations for 2026 and institutional awards for the NTB, have reinforced confidence in the country's trajectory. Sebulon described such recognition as confirmation of momentum rather than an end in itself. These endorsements, coupled with a clearer institutional mandate, are intended to strengthen Namibia's credibility in commercial negotiations, particularly with airlines



and international partners.

The NTB emphasizes structured public-private engagement, seeking to move the private sector from a supportive role to that of co-creator. Co-marketing programmes with airlines, MOUs with strategic partners and incentives for private investment form part of the operational playbook. Sebulon said the Board is "creating vehicles for private investment, with incentives and clear frameworks so the private sector can commit capital to scale."

Operational targets include an ambition to meet or exceed pre-pandemic arrivals, with a near-term goal around 1.5 million visitors, building on the 1.2 million recorded in 2024. Achieving these targets will depend on continued market momentum, strengthened connectivity, and the mobilization of private capital into product and service upgrades. Sebulon noted that early indicators from airport arrivals are positive, while full statistical verification remains ongoing.

Namibia's roadmap combines institutional reform, enhanced connectivity, market diversification and product activation with data-led decision-making. The NTB's plan frames tourism as a vehicle for inclusive economic growth, positioning the sector to capture higher-value visitors, spread benefits across communities, and sustain long-term competitiveness. As the Board transitions from strategy to execution, its ability to mobilize partnerships and convert recognition into commercial returns will determine how quickly the country fulfils its stated ambitions.

Madagascar launches nationwide campaign to restore its tourism image

Madagascar has taken a major step to reinvigorate its tourism sector with the launch of a national campaign designed to rebuild confidence, boost visibility and unify messaging about the island nation's unique appeal. The initiative, known as "Let's Restore the Image of Madagascar Together" (REIM), brings together government institutions, tourism operators, airlines, influencers, artists, athletes, and the Malagasy diaspora in a collective effort to present Madagascar as an emerging, authentic and safe destination.

The campaign is being spearheaded by the National Tourism Office of Madagascar (ONTM) in partnership with Madagascar Airlines and the Ministère du Tourisme et de l'Artisanat. According to the organisers, the country's global image needs a cohesive and positive narrative to strengthen competitiveness on both regional and international stages.

The REIM initiative seeks to mobilise Malagasy people across all sectors—whether creatives, sporting personalities, content creators or industry professionals—to champion the nation's tourism potential. The objective is to reaffirm Madagascar's place as a destination rich in culture, biodiversity and adventure, while assuring travellers of its safety and readiness to welcome visitors.

As part of the wider drive to revitalise the sector, the partners also unveiled the Mada Best Deals digital platform, led by Ravinala Airports Madagascar. The platform serves as a free online marketplace showcasing promotions and exclusive offers from tourism operators nationwide, aimed at making travel within Madagascar more accessible and affordable.

The campaign reached a major milestone on Friday in Ivato, where



the three institutions officially signed a memorandum of understanding to formalise their commitment. The signing ceremony coincided with the launch of the Mada Best Deals platform, symbolising a coordinated move to stimulate the industry, create opportunities for tourism businesses and extend support to local communities.

Benoît Harter Appointed Director of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority

Mauritius' Minister of Tourism, Richard Duval, has announced the appointment of Benoît Harter as Director of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA), placing him at the helm of the institution responsible for the international promotion of the island's tourism sector.

The appointment comes at a time when Mauritius is facing increased competition within the Indian Ocean and beyond, alongside shifting expectations from international travellers. Minister Duval described the period ahead as challenging and underlined the importance of close coordination between the executive management of the MTPA and its governance structure.

Harter will work alongside MTPA Chairman Dinesh Burrenchobay, whose appointment the minister identified as a key element in strengthening leadership at the Authority. The ministry has indicated that the focus of the new leadership team will include repositioning Mauritius in its traditional source markets, attracting new visitor segments and adapting the destination's tourism offer to evolving trends in luxury and sustainable travel.

Tourism remains one of the main pillars of the Mauritian economy, with the MTPA serving as the primary agency responsible for shaping the country's global tourism image. Among the challenges highlighted by the ministry are strengthening visibility in European and Asian markets, modernising digital communication tools and promoting a distinctive destination identity in a highly competitive regional

landscape.

Benoît Harter brings 28 years of experience across the hospitality sector, creative industries and event management. He began his career in Mauritius' luxury hotel industry, with professional experience at Scott, Sugar Beach Resorts and Trou aux Biches Resort, where he developed practical knowledge of high-end tourism operations and international client expectations.

According to the new director, one of his immediate priorities will be the restructuring of the organisation. He has also indicated that his first focus will be the MTPA's promotional campaign for the first half of 2026. With January forecasts described as positive, attention will then move to sustaining performance in February and March.

The ministry has stated that the new leadership is expected to guide the MTPA through a period of transition as the tourism sector continues to adjust to post-pandemic conditions and evolving global market dynamics.



Tuareg Heritage Takes Center Stage as the 17th Air Festival Wraps in Iférouane



The 17th Festival of the Air opened in Iférouane on 5 December, convening thousands of attendees for three days of cultural programming and landscape immersion at the foot of Mount Tamgak. As the 2025 edition officially came to a close today, the festival wrapped up a vibrant programme that highlighted the cultural, economic and touristic importance of the Air region. Held under the theme, "Promoting Domestic Tourism and Handicrafts, Pillars of National Sovereignty and Resilient Development," the edition assembled official delegations from Chad, Burkina Faso and Niger, alongside travellers, culture specialists and local communities to foreground the economic and social role of Tuareg heritage in northern Niger.

An integrated cultural programme transformed Iférouane into a living showcase of nomadic practice and artisanal production. Daily activities included camel parades and the contest for the most beautiful camel, events that underscore animal mastery and longstanding pastoral prestige.

Traditional dances and music punctuated the schedule, while tendé performances, ancestral rhythms led by women, served as the festival's musical hallmark, resonating across dunes and rock outcrops. Beauty contests and parades in traditional attire highlighted Tuareg ornaments and sartorial traditions, and an exhibition and marketplace offered locally made crafts, from Agadez crosses and silver jewellery to leatherwork and decorative objects.

The festival's itinerary extended beyond town boundaries to the Chiriet site, where visitors encountered the Air's striking geomorphology, a landscape in which golden dunes meet volcanic massif. Organised excursions to Chiriet provided opportunities for night-time observation under clear desert skies and panoramic views that frame the region's tourism potential. For regular attendees, and for newcomers seeking a comprehensive desert experience, Chiriet remains integral to the Festival of the Air programme.

Alongside cultural performances and

craft commerce, the event staged a forum on peace and social cohesion, convened by the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace. The forum brought together local leaders, experts and community representatives to discuss dialogue and stability as foundations for sustainable tourism and local development. The inclusion of this forum reflects the festival's dual purpose, cultural and civic, and its role as a platform for policy-oriented exchanges that link heritage preservation with economic resilience.

The festival's stated theme framed the proceedings in terms of domestic tourism and artisanal industries as strategic assets. Handicraft sales and exhibitions function as immediate income channels for local artisans, while market visibility at a festival of this scale supports longer term value chains tied to national sovereignty. By drawing delegations from neighbouring states, the event also reinforced regional cultural diplomacy and cross-border exchange, aspects that organisers identify as important for destination



development and for building intra-regional visitor flows.

Operationally, the Festival of the Air demonstrated the convergence of cultural programming, local commerce and landscape tourism. Camel-related ceremonies and tendé performances attracted both domestic visitors and international heritage travellers, while the craft marketplace enabled direct engagement between producers and buyers. The festival timetable combined staged events with open-market activity, allowing artisans to translate cultural display into commercial opportunity, and enabling tour operators to package experiential excursions that link the festival to broader Saharan itineraries.

For northern Niger, the festival serves multiple functions: it is a cultural reaffirmation of Tuareg identity, an economic occasion for artisans and traders, and a practical testing ground for tourism initiatives that rely on local stewardship and security. The presence of the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace underlined an institutional recognition that cultural events of this scale require collaborative governance, in which community leadership, public authorities and private stakeholders coordinate to protect heritage, enable safe access and capture economic value for local populations.

The 17th Festival of the Air reaffirmed the region's potential as a distinctive cultural and landscape destination, while stressing the necessity of policy coherence to translate momentary visitation into sustained development.



Africa Adventure Specialists targets Latin America at FITUR 2026 with immersive African experiences

As the global travel and tourism industry prepares for one of its most influential trade gatherings, FITUR 2026, Africa Adventure Specialists (AAS) is positioning itself to make a strong impression on the Latin American market. The travel fair will take place in Madrid from January 21–25, drawing tourism stakeholders from across the world. AAS will be among the exhibitors, with a clear focus on expanding its footprint in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking markets across Latin America.

Ahead of the event, Andrew Kitema, Managing Co-Owner of Africa Adventure Specialists, spoke extensively with VoyagesAfriq, outlining the company's strategy, product focus and long-term vision for the Latino market.

According to Kitema, Latin America has evolved into a key growth market for AAS over the years. "The Latin American market has steadily grown into a strategic source market for Africa Adventure Specialists," he said. "Over recent years, we have seen increased interest from Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking travellers seeking authentic, experience-driven African journeys, particularly safaris combined with culture, history and soft adventure."

He explained that AAS has been deliberate in responding to this growing demand. "We have worked closely with regional partners, adapted itineraries, and strengthened our trade

relationships in Latin America and through global platforms such as FITUR, ANATO, WTM Latin America, and FIT in Buenos Aires," Kitema noted, adding that these engagements have helped the company better understand market expectations and preferences.

When asked about the types of products that resonate most strongly with Latino travellers, Kitema highlighted Africa's iconic wildlife destinations and emotionally engaging experiences. "Latino travellers are particularly drawn to immersive safari experiences, iconic wildlife encounters, and destinations with strong storytelling such as the Maasai Mara, Serengeti, Ngorongoro and Gorilla trekking regions," he said. "There is also growing demand for multi-country itineraries, combining safaris with beach extensions, cultural interactions and light adventure."

While comfort remains important, Kitema stressed that it is not the primary driver. "Authenticity and emotional connection to the destination are what truly resonate," he emphasised.

This year, Africa Adventure Specialists plans to consolidate and refine its offerings for the Latin American market. "We are focusing on consolidating custom-designed FIT and small group journeys, enhanced by thematic travel such as photography-led safaris, conservation-focused experiences and special-interest travel," Kitema revealed. He added that the company is also prioritising operational excellence: "We are strengthening our end-to-end service delivery, ensuring seamless logistics, reliable ground handling, and flexible products that appeal to both first-time and repeat travellers from Latin America."

Managing the AAS portfolio across the Americas, Kitema explained, requires a nuanced and region-specific approach. "It requires a deep understanding of diverse traveller profiles, booking behaviours, and seasonal patterns across North, Central and South America," he said. "It involves aligning African products with market expectations, supporting trade partners with timely information, and ensuring that AAS consistently delivers on quality, trust



and long-term partnerships across the region."

On the broader vision for the company, Kitema described 2026 as a pivotal year for sustainable and diversified growth. "The bigger picture for AAS in 2026 is centred on sustainable growth, market diversification and product excellence," he stated. "We aim to deepen our presence in emerging markets such as Latin America while strengthening established ones, invest in technology and partnerships and continue positioning Africa as a destination of depth, diversity, and lasting value."

He concluded by reaffirming the company's guiding principles: "Our focus remains on responsible tourism, strong trade collaboration and delivering memorable journeys across the continent."

With FITUR offering a vital gateway to the Latin American travel trade, Africa Adventure Specialists' presence in Madrid underscores its ambition to connect Africa more deeply with a market increasingly eager for meaningful, experience-led journeys across the continent.



Mauro Couayrahourcq - commercial Director Latin America & Hispanic Markets & Mauricio Quintero Colombia GSA sales Manager

Africa gears up for stronger presence at FITUR 2026 as continental participation expands



Africa is set to make a bold statement at the 2026 edition of FITUR, the International Tourism Trade Fair scheduled for January in Madrid, Spain, with organisers anticipating a significant surge in African participation and visibility at one of the world's leading tourism showcases.

Organisers have confirmed that Africa's footprint at FITUR 2026 is expected to grow by more than 30 per cent in stand space compared to the previous edition, reflecting rising interest among African destinations and tourism stakeholders in the European and global travel market. To accommodate this expansion, the African exhibition area will be located in Hall 6 of IFEMA Madrid, which it will share with exhibitors from the Middle East, positioning Africa within a high-traffic and strategically important zone of the fair.

A strong lineup of African countries has confirmed official participation, underlining the continent's collective drive to promote tourism, investment opportunities and destination diversity. Countries with official representation at FITUR 2026 include Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Mauritania, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Namibia, Cabo Verde, Mauritius, Algeria, The Gambia, Seychelles and Sierra Leone.

Several destinations will be making notable debuts at the fair. Zanzibar will participate for the first time through the Zanzibar Commission for Tourism, marking a significant step in the archipelago's international destination marketing efforts. São Tomé and Príncipe, Benin and Angola are also confirmed as first-time exhibitors, signalling growing confidence among emerging African destinations to engage directly with the global travel trade. Algeria will be returning to FITUR after a two-year absence, while Uganda's presence will be strengthened not only by the Uganda Tourism Board but also by the Uganda Sustainable Tour Operators Association, highlighting a focus on responsible and sustainable tourism.

Kenya's participation will be led by the Kenya Association of Tour Operators, reinforcing the private sector's role in driving Africa's tourism promotion, while Tanzania's involvement further underscores East Africa's continued prominence on the international tourism stage.

A major highlight of Africa's participation at FITUR 2026 is the first-ever presence of the African Travel and Tourism Association (ATTA) at the fair. ATTA's debut is expected to provide a stronger continental voice, facilitate pan-African networking, and enhance collaboration

between African tourism businesses and international buyers.

Beyond official country pavilions, individual exhibitors from across the continent will add further depth to Africa's showcase. These include tourism stakeholders from Rwanda, Ethiopia, South Africa, Zambia, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Botswana, Malawi and Madagascar, offering a broad cross-section of Africa's tourism products, from heritage and culture to wildlife, adventure and luxury travel.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe and Equatorial Guinea are reported to be in the final stages of confirming their participation, which could further expand Africa's presence at the 2026 fair.

With increased floor space, new market entrants and the growing involvement of both public and private sector stakeholders, Africa's participation at FITUR 2026 is shaping up to be one of the most diverse and impactful in the fair's history. The expanded presence not only reflects renewed global interest in African destinations but also signals the continent's strategic intent to position tourism as a key driver of economic growth, cultural exchange and sustainable development on the world stage.

Kenya's Tourism Ministry opens door to Stakeholder Proposals ahead of Policy rollout

Kenya's Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife says it will review proposals from stakeholders across the tourism sector in preparation for major policy pronouncements by President William Ruto during last year's Jamhuri Day celebrations.

Speaking on the second day of the Kenya Tourism, Wildlife and MICE Week showcase held at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), CS Rebecca Miano said that stakeholder input will be critical in shaping the future direction of Kenya's tourism industry.

"As we chart the future of the tourism sector, I want to urge all stakeholders to bring forward your proposals and recommendations so that we can deliberate on how we shall move this sector forward," Miano told the stakeholders.

"These submissions will be a very critical component of the comprehensive framework that we are developing even as we prepare for the Jamhuri Day celebrations on Friday where President William Ruto will make major policy pronouncements to enhance the transformation of the tourism sector," she added.

Earlier in the day, panel discussions were held bringing together various industry leaders, government officials, county representatives and private sector

players, with the second day's agenda focused on Tourism. Stakeholders sought ways on how to improve the sector, with the objective of meeting the collective target of 5.5 million tourists by 2027.

Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) CEO, June Chepkemei, noted that innovation remains a key focus area in marketing Kenya as a leading tourism destination.

"As a sector, we find ourselves competing for the same pool of country resources against other more important sectors, like health, education and infrastructure. Hence, we need to keep innovating in order to make the most of the resources allocated to us in order to market and maintain Kenya as a leading tourism destination," she stated.

"Through campaigns such as Tembea Kenya for the domestic traveler and Magical Kenya for the international tourist and the recent Magical Kenya Mountain trails, we keep innovating around our products. We'll be launching new campaigns at the end of this week, to keep our momentum going," Chepkemei added.

Another key discussion was on the development of the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) sector where stakeholders called for more investment in infrastructure and enhanced capacity development as the country seeks to enhance its



MICE competitiveness in the region and position itself as Africa's premier MICE hub.

Conversations on enhancing destination competitiveness also took center stage, with participants exploring strategies to improve Kenya's global tourism ranking through improved air connectivity and modernized facilities.

Other sessions tackled tourism governance and regulatory reforms and unlocking capital for tourism transformation, with stakeholders highlighting the need for innovative financing mechanisms and investment incentives to drive sector growth.

The Kenya Tourism, Wildlife and MICE Week continues till Thursday before culminating in the Jamhuri Day celebrations on Friday at the Nyayo Stadium, Nairobi. The week-long showcase involves an array of tourism-related activities aimed at establishing Kenya's tourism sector as a cornerstone of economic growth.

Ida Njie appointed Director General of the Gambia Tourism Board



Ms. Ida Jeng Njie has officially been appointed as the new Director General of The Gambia Tourism Board (GTBoard) marking an important milestone in the continued development and strategic

direction of The Gambia's tourism industry.

The official handover ceremony took place at the GTBoard Head Office, where the outgoing Director General, Mr. Abubacarr S. Camara, formally handed over responsibilities to Ms. Njie. The transition reflects the Board's commitment to continuity, stability, and effective leadership within the sector.

Ms. Njie brings with her extensive experience and a strong understanding of tourism development, destination marketing, and stakeholder engagement. In her acceptance remarks, she reaffirmed her commitment to strengthening partnerships, enhancing service delivery, and positioning The

Gambia more competitively within the global tourism market.

Ms. Njie, previously serving as Director of International Marketing, brings over 20 years of expertise in destination promotion. She is credited as one of the pioneers in elevating The Gambia's global tourism profile, having been among the first staff deployed to the GTBoard's London office.

This appointment comes at a strategic time for Destination Gambia, as the country continues to consolidate recent gains, expand source markets, and promote sustainable tourism practices that benefit communities and the wider economy.



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CRAIG THE ELEPHANT:

A Giant's Legacy for Conservation and Wildlife Tourism in Africa

By Francis Doku

"Craig is dead." It is one of the most devastating and unsettling conservation stories to emerge in 2026. Remarkably, it broke on the same day the United States launched an attack on Venezuela and confirmed the capture of President Nicolás Maduro, yet news of Craig's death cut through the global media noise with remarkable force. For hours, timelines, news feeds and conservation networks across continents were flooded with grief, disbelief and tribute. It was a rare moment when an elephant commanded global attention alongside geopolitics, reminding the world that some lives transcend borders, ideologies and headlines.

In 2024, I stood in quiet awe on the plains of Amboseli National Park, watching a living giant move with unhurried grace against the backdrop of Mount Kilimanjaro. It was my first visit to Amboseli, part of a hosted media trip by the Kenya Tourism Board ahead of the Magical Kenya Tourism Expo. Like many others on that journey (and most other tourists who visit Amboseli for the first time), I had heard the stories, seen the photographs, read the legends. But nothing prepares you for standing before Craig.

He was immense, ancient and deeply dignified. His tusks, long enough to brush the earth, seemed almost unreal. In that moment, Craig was not just an elephant. He was history, continuity and a powerful reminder of why conservation matters.



In early January 2026, news broke that Craig, one of Africa's last remaining super tuskers, had died peacefully from natural causes at the age of 54. Almost instantly, tributes poured in from across Kenya and far beyond. Conservationists, tourism stakeholders, photographers, safari guides, researchers, government agencies and travellers who had encountered him shared memories, images and reflections. The reaction made one thing clear - Craig was not only Kenya's elephant. He belonged to Africa, and indeed to the world.

A Symbol Beyond Amboseli

Craig's stature extended far beyond Amboseli National Park. He was a global conservation icon, recognised not just for the sheer size of his tusks, but for what his survival represented in an era when elephants face relentless threats from poaching, habitat loss and human-wildlife conflict.

According to conservation groups and wildlife authorities, fewer than a dozen super tuskers are believed to remain across Africa. Each one is a genetic

and ecological marvel. Craig's tusks, each weighing well over 45 kilograms, placed him among the rarest of the rare. His longevity alone was a triumph of sustained conservation.

The Kenya Wildlife Service described him as a "living monument to Africa's natural heritage", a phrase that resonated widely as tributes flooded social media platforms and conservation networks. On Facebook, posts shared by rangers, tour operators and wildlife enthusiasts reflected not just grief, but gratitude. Many spoke of him as a gentle giant, calm in temperament, tolerant of safari vehicles and seemingly aware of his place in the ecosystem.

Tributes from the Conservation and Tourism Worlds

The response to Craig's passing revealed how deeply intertwined wildlife conservation and tourism have become. Conservation organisations hailed him as proof that long-term protection works. Safari operators recalled how guests would travel thousands of kilometres with one wish - to see Craig. Photographers described him as a dream subject, while guides spoke of introducing him to visitors as though presenting royalty.

Across Facebook and other platforms, messages came in from all corners of the tourism world - from lodge managers in Amboseli and Maasai Mara, to tour companies in Europe and North America, to African travel writers and filmmakers. Many described Craig as a personal highlight of their careers. Others acknowledged that he had helped put Amboseli firmly on the global wildlife tourism map.

This collective response underscores a crucial point often overlooked in conservation debates. Iconic animals like Craig are not just ecological assets. They are economic and cultural anchors for destinations that rely heavily on responsible wildlife tourism.

Preservation, Not Profit

In the days following his death, the Kenya Wildlife Service made it clear that Craig's tusks would not be sold or commercialised. Instead, they will be

preserved as part of Kenya's national heritage. This decision was widely welcomed across conservation and tourism circles.

In a continent where illegal ivory trade has historically devastated elephant populations, the symbolic importance of this choice cannot be overstated. Preserving Craig's tusks reinforces the message that Africa's wildlife heritage is not for exploitation, but for education, memory and intergenerational stewardship.

It also aligns with Kenya's longstanding anti-poaching stance. Kenya famously burned its ivory stockpiles in acts of defiance against the ivory trade, choosing conservation ethics over short-term financial gain. Craig's tusks, preserved for posterity, now become part of that broader narrative.

Tourism, Conservation and Community Impact

Craig's life coincided with a period of renewed conservation success in Kenya. Official figures show that Kenya's elephant population has grown steadily in recent years, rising from just over 36,000 in 2021 to more than 42,000 by 2025. This recovery is directly linked to anti-poaching measures, improved ranger capacity and stronger community involvement.

For tourism, these numbers matter. Wildlife tourism remains one of Africa's strongest tourism pillars. In Kenya, elephants are among the top attractions driving park visits, lodge occupancy and employment along the tourism value chain. From rangers and guides to hoteliers, drivers and artisans, livelihoods are directly tied to the survival of animals like Craig.

My encounter with Craig was not just memorable because of his size, but because of what he represented - decades of effort, sacrifice and belief that wildlife can coexist with people when managed responsibly.

A Gentle Giant with a Lasting Legacy

Those who followed Craig over the years often remarked on his calm nature. Despite his size, he was known for being

non-aggressive, often posing patiently as visitors observed from a respectful distance. That temperament made him accessible, even relatable, and further strengthened his status as Amboseli's most recognisable resident.

Craig also sired numerous calves, ensuring that his genetic legacy lives on in the Amboseli ecosystem. In conservation terms, this is perhaps his most enduring contribution. His lineage continues to roam the plains, a living reminder that protection yields continuity.

What Craig Leaves Behind

Craig's passing is a moment of reflection for Africa's tourism and conservation sectors. It reminds us that iconic wildlife is finite. Each loss carries emotional, ecological and economic consequences. It also reinforces the responsibility placed on governments, conservation bodies, tourism operators and travellers to protect what remains.

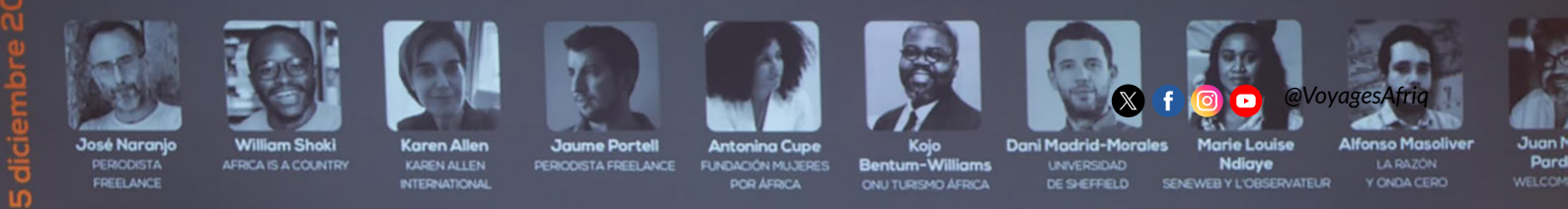
For those of us fortunate enough to have seen him, Craig will always be more than a photograph or a memory. He embodied the soul of Amboseli, the power of conservation and the promise of wildlife tourism done right.

As Africa continues to position itself as a premier wildlife destination, Craig's story offers both inspiration and warning. Conservation works, but only when it is continuous, funded and respected. Tourism thrives when it supports protection, not exploitation.

Standing before Craig in 2024, I did not know it would be a once-in-a-lifetime encounter. In hindsight, it feels like a quiet privilege. His life and legacy now belong to history, but his impact will continue to shape how Africa tells its wildlife story to the world.

Craig may be gone, but the giant he represented will continue to walk alongside Africa's conservation journey for generations to come.

The author is a pan-African travel writer, podcaster, tourism promoter, and founder of Accra-based marketing, travel, tourism and MICE promotion agency, Maestro Africa Group.



REWRITING THE NARRATIVE: Why Africa's Tourism Future Depends on Who Tells the Story

For decades, Africa's image in global media has been shaped less by lived realities and more by inherited stereotypes. Conflict, crisis, poverty and despair have too often dominated the headlines, flattening a vast and diverse continent into a single, misleading narrative. At the Africa-Spain Journalists Meeting held on 5 December 2025 in Spain, this long-standing imbalance was placed firmly under the spotlight with tourism emerging as both a casualty of misrepresentation and a powerful tool for change.

Convened by Casa África, the forum brought together journalists, communicators and tourism thinkers to interrogate the cost of stereotypes, not only on perception, but on livelihoods, investment and Africa's global positioning. A key intervention, delivered by Kojo Bentum-Williams, a Senior

Communications Specialist in Africa at UN Tourism, challenged participants to confront how media storytelling has quietly shaped travel decisions, destination branding and economic opportunity across the continent.

"Africa does not suffer from a lack of attractions. It suffers from a lack of fair storytelling," Kojo noted, drawing nods across the room.

Tourism, by its very nature, is perception-driven. When destinations are repeatedly framed through fear or pity, travellers hesitate, investors pull back and communities lose out. Despite its unmatched cultural depth and natural wealth, Africa still accounts for just about 5% of global tourism revenues, a figure many experts attribute more to narrative failure than destination readiness.



The meeting unpacked what author Chimamanda Adichie famously described as the "danger of a single story." In tourism terms, that danger translates into missed flights, empty hotel rooms, stalled infrastructure and unrealized jobs. Yet, the conversation was not anchored in critique alone; it was rich with examples of narrative resistance.

Rwanda stood out as a compelling case study. Once globally defined by the horrors of the 1994 genocide, the country has, through deliberate strategy, reclaimed its story. Investments in conservation, innovation and sports diplomacy, most visibly through the 'Visit Rwanda' partnership with Arsenal FC, reframed the nation in the global imagination. The results speak volumes: tourism revenues nearing \$500 million, a 300% growth in arrivals between 2010 and 2019, and a renewed curiosity rooted in respect rather than sympathy. This, speakers argued, is what happens when destinations own their narratives.

The forum also tackled uncomfortable terrain, including poverty tourism, warning against storytelling that turns hardship into spectacle. True tourism development, it was stressed, must be community-led, dignity-centred and locally narrated, ensuring that visibility translates into value for host populations.

Encouragingly, data supports this shift. Provisional figures from UN Tourism show Africa recording a 20% increase in international arrivals, outperforming

several traditional markets. While infrastructure and policy matter, the meeting underscored that media tone and narrative framing are fast becoming competitive tourism assets.

Casa África's role was repeatedly acknowledged. As organizers, the institution reaffirmed its mission to broaden and deepen Spanish media coverage of Africa, moving beyond crisis reporting to stories of innovation, culture, science and everyday life. Not by denying challenges, but by contextualizing them, giving them names, faces and meaning.

As digital platforms democratize storytelling, young African creators are already reshaping perceptions in real time highlighting cities, cuisine, fashion and creativity to millions worldwide. The

challenge now is alignment: between journalists, tourism boards, institutions and communities.

The takeaway from the Africa-Spain Journalists Meeting was clear. Africa's tourism future will be written by those who tell its stories with honesty, balance and confidence. Change the narrative, and the numbers follow. Reframe the story, and the world responds.

As Africa looks ahead, tourism remains not just an economic sector, but a powerful storytelling arena, one capable of correcting history, restoring agency and unlocking a fuller, fairer global engagement with the continent.

And perhaps the most urgent question is no longer **what Africa has to offer**, but **who is telling the story, and how well they are telling it**.



“This is our moment”:

UTB CEO Juliana Kagwa leads Uganda into a new tourism era

At last year's IBTM World, the flagship global meetings and events showcase in Barcelona, newly appointed CEO of the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB), Juliana Kagwa, led official delegation to bring the East African country's burgeoning MICE and tourism sector to the world.

Just five months into her role, she says the stars are finally aligning for Uganda's tourism industry – and she is determined to ride the momentum with a reinvigorated strategy, bold targets and a fresh spirit of public-private partnership.

Speaking on the VA Tourism Podcast with host Kojo Bentum-Williams, Kagwa described her journey into the position as both unexpected and deeply transformative.

“It's been a roller coaster,” she said. “Tourism is not what you see from the sidelines. Once you're in it, you start to understand it has so many facets. It is one of the most exciting and fastest-growing sectors in Uganda – possibly in the world.”

Kagwa's entry into tourism was never part of a masterplan. With a professional background spanning top-tier global brands like GlaxoSmithKline, Diageo, Heineken and East African Breweries, she spent most of her career selling products and shaping consumer experiences.

“My background is marketing and selling,” she explained. “I've been selling since I left university.”

Her corporate experience, however, quietly prepared her for tourism – a sector she says is fundamentally about experience delivery, value exchange and customer satisfaction.

“The alcohol beverage industry is all about socialisation, entertainment and service. I'd already started getting a taste for tourism without knowing,” she reflected.

After a stint in agriculture with SeedCo, she was urged by peers – not government officials – to apply for the vacant UTB role.

“They said, ‘Juliana, you have the experience, you have the networks, and you have the energy.’ So, I applied. If I got it, great; if not, I was happy at SeedCo. And here we are today.”

The state of tourism: “This is our moment”

Kagwa believes Uganda has entered a golden era of tourism positioning and government prioritisation.

“This is the most exciting time in the history of Uganda to be in tourism,” she affirmed. “Tourism is now topical. Finally, it has the right public sector attention and backing.”

Today, tourism is no longer siloed under the Ministry of Tourism. It has become cross-government priority.

“There is no public sector meeting that doesn't touch tourism,” she said. “It is now in the Uganda Investment

Authority, Ministry of Trade, Ministry of Agriculture. We are even developing agritourism – coffee, the Ankole cow, and many products we never previously viewed as tourism assets.”

The shift is reinforced by Uganda's new strategic growth plan, which places tourism at the centre of economic expansion.

“We have four strategic pillars – agriculture, tourism, minerals and science and technology. We call them the ATMs – the money churning engines,” Kagwa explained. “Tourism is pegged to grow 25-fold. That means we must invest ahead, and the government is doing exactly that.”

Government investment on the rise

She reveals that last year the tourism sector secured a dramatic increase in state funding.

“We attracted 250% more investment from the consolidated fund,” she said, noting that investment is now flowing into infrastructure, aerodromes, roads serving national parks and marketing campaigns.

One of the biggest transformations Kagwa says she is driving is opening the industry's growth engine to the private sector – not as supporters, but as co-creators.

“We're not going at it alone anymore,” she explained. “The public sector has opened the floodgates for the private sector to participate. For every step we take, we are onboarding the private sector for investment, ideation and execution.”

In her view, unlocking the full tourism experience – one that “touches all five senses” – requires commercial expertise.

“The private sector are the experience experts. Nobody does commerce like the private sector,” she said. “Our job is to build the vehicle for participation, to create the frameworks that make investment worthwhile.”

Uganda takes MICE ambitions to Barcelona

At this year's IBTM World, UTB's message is clear: Uganda is ready to become a competitive player in the global MICE market.

“Our MICE sector is still raw,” she admitted. “But that is great potential. Every successful destination has already shown us the blueprint.”

Uganda's strongest selling point, she noted, is its location and natural assets.

“If you come to us, the biggest incentive is our address. We sit on the shores of Lake Victoria. We have 165 lakes, multiple biodomes and a richness of flora and fauna that very few places in the world can match.”

But alongside the pitch is serious groundwork: improving capacity, accessibility and service standards.

“We are ensuring that we are accessible. Uganda Airlines is opening direct routes from London, Johannesburg, Guangzhou, Lagos and Mumbai. One direct flight speaks a million words.”

“We have four strategic pillars – agriculture, tourism, minerals and science and technology. We call them the ATMs – the money churning engines. Tourism is pegged to grow 25-fold. That means we must invest ahead, and the government is doing exactly that.”

POATE 2026 – Uganda to deliver the ‘Wanderlust’ experience

Kagwa's strategic vision will come sharply into focus at the 2026 Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo (POATE), scheduled for 20th of May 2026, the 10th edition of the flagship tourism showcase.

“Our theme is Wanderlust – the irresistible urge to explore, to travel, to adventure,” she said. “We are packaging Uganda as a one-stop-shop immersion experience.”

She promises that POATE will demonstrate Uganda as Africa in one destination:

“You fly to one place and you get dry savannah, wet savannah, rainforest, mountains, snow-capped peaks, crater lakes, culture and heritage. Uganda is a gift that won't stop giving.”

UTB has set aggressive targets for the next cycle.

“Last year we closed at about 1.3 million arrivals,” she said. “We want to double that to about 3 million. We also want to double GDP earnings from tourism.”

But increasing arrivals alone is not enough – visitor expenditure must rise.

“Currently tourists spend between US\$160 and US\$180 a day. We want to double that. Within seven days in Uganda, you should spend at least US\$2,000 for the sector to make business sense.”

The UTB CEO also acknowledged that strategy alone is not enough – perception must change, and success must be heard.

“We need to tell the story. When there are green shoots, we must report them,” she said. “This moment is ours – and it is time the world knew it.”

Seychelles' updated Tourism Environmental Sustainability Levy takes off!

The Government of Seychelles has approved amendments to the Environment Protection (Tourism Environmental Sustainability Levy) Regulations. The updated measures came into effect on 1 January 2026.

From the beginning of the year, small accommodation establishments (as defined in the Regulations) will no longer be subject to the levy. This change is intended to ease cost pressures on smaller operators, provide greater operational flexibility, and support their continued contribution to the tourism sector.

Also from 1 January 2026, the levy will continue to be charged per person per night and collected in-destination by tourism accommodation providers at the following rates:

SCR 75 for medium accommodation establishments (25–50 rooms)

SCR 100 for large accommodation establishments (more than 50 rooms)

SCR 100 for yachts and island resorts

The revised regulations maintain all existing exemptions. The levy does not apply to:

- Citizens and residents of Seychelles
- Airline and yacht crew members
- Children aged 12 years and under

These changes are designed to ensure that the Tourism Environmental Sustainability Levy remains fair, targeted, and supportive of both sustainable development and the long-term resilience of the tourism industry.

Botswana Tourism CEO announces sustainability agenda, new regulations and fresh push for MICE growth

The CEO of the Botswana Tourism Organisation (BTO), Keitumestse Setlang, has reaffirmed Botswana's commitment to sustainability-led tourism growth and announced progress on the country's updated tourism regulations during an interview on the VA Tourism Podcast at the 2025 AirlinePros Global Conference in Cape Town.

Keitumestse, who joined host Kojo Bentum-Williams for a wide-ranging discussion, said Botswana's new Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) policy had been approved by Parliament and would soon take effect once the accompanying regulations are finalised. She stressed that the updated framework is designed to "meet the immediacy of time" and ensure that citizens benefit more directly from natural resources.

"It is a government position to ensure that we extract value from our resources," she said. "And it is also a government position to ensure that as we extract this value... animals are protected and we use tourism activity to plant back into preservation of the heritage resource and conservation of the natural resource."

In Cape Town, Botswana drew attention with a video message from President Advocate Duma Gideon Boko, reinforcing the country's sustainability agenda. Keitumestse said the intervention sent a strong signal to global partners, particularly destination management companies (DMCs) in attendance.

"The message on sustainability... brought to this conference through a video with the head of state... was a show of commitment by the Botswana government," she explained. "What they particularly like about our story in Botswana is that to us, sustainability is keeping a balance between the ecosystem, the environment and the people."

She added that the consistency of Botswana's sustainability message — reiterated by successive presidents — reflects its central place in national policy.

CBNRM Policy Update: 'There Is No Vacuum'

Keitumestse confirmed that the revised CBNRM policy is ready, approved and awaiting activation through new regulations. Until the new framework is operational, the existing policy remains in

use.

"Parliament approved that this new CBNRM policy should be put into use. It has been approved," she affirmed. "Regulations have been drafted now... there is no vacuum. We are still using the old one until the new one comes into force."

The Minister of Environment and Tourism, she said, has been engaging communities nationwide to help them appreciate their role in conservation. According to her, understanding value motivates greater local involvement.

"When people see the role they have to play or appreciate that they draw value, they then play a bigger role," she noted.

Big agenda for MICE, sports & aviation

Botswana is preparing to host AviaDev Africa — the continent's leading route development forum — from 10–12 June 2026. Keitumestse described the event as a major milestone in the country's growing MICE ambitions.

"Botswana is fast growing as a MICE destination," she said. "We've got the space, we've got the infrastructure, we've got the people, we've got the services to host the world."

She confirmed that BTO is already implementing the national MICE strategy with renewed energy, adding new convention facilities and upgrading existing ones to meet global standards.

Beyond Botswana's traditional strongholds — the Okavango Delta, Chobe River, Makgadikgadi pans and Kgalagadi landscapes — Keitumestse said the country is increasingly promoting lifestyle tourism and the creative arts.

"We also have... cities lending themselves very well for lifestyle-based tourism," she said. "The creative arts in terms of dance, music, food, in terms of dress... are coming in fast and very quickly as part of the tourism offering."

Keitumestse credited Botswana's sports stars, including world athletics sensation Letsile Tebogo, for elevating the country's global visibility. Botswana Tourism works closely with the Botswana National Sports Commission (BNSC) to ensure athletes can help showcase the nation.

"These are brands," she said. "Where we



can, we provide details they require to be able to speak about their destination out there."

Sports events such as the Makgadikgadi Epic, the Kalahari Challenge and the returning Desert Race remain powerful drawcards, she added.

Air connectivity remains central to Botswana's growth agenda. Keitumestse, who is part of the national air access team, highlighted recent gains.

"We recently received South African Airways, which flies from Gaborone to Johannesburg and back," she said. "South African Airlink has increased its frequency. Ethiopian Airlines have done that also for the routes in Maun. We also have FlyNamibia... we have ProFlight. We need more direct flights into Botswana."

BTO is targeting a 10% increase in arrivals for 2026, building on the current record of 1.8 million visitors.

"We want to start with a minimum 10 percent, but we want to grow as far as possible," she said. "We have a task to double our numbers by the fifth year from now."

For Keitumestse, there is so much the world must travel to Botswana to experience.

"We remain ready to roll the red carpet out for you," she said. "To you tourists, we still have rooms to fill and we are ready to host you in Botswana... Botswana is safe. You are invited to visit."

Africa Showcase Middle East to open new frontiers for African tourism in GCC market

Africa's tourism offering is poised for a major push into the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) market with the launch of the inaugural Africa Showcase Middle East, scheduled to take place from 25–29 January 2026 across Doha, Qatar, and Dubai, UAE.

The roadshow is being organised by Africa Showcase, with Sadiq Dindar, Director of Global Sales and Marketing at Tingana Global Travel, serving as both a key partner to the event and one of its principal advocates. In an in-depth interview with VoyagesAfriq, Dindar outlined the rationale behind the initiative, the readiness of Africa for the Middle Eastern market, and why the timing is right for a more structured engagement with GCC travel trade partners.

Reflecting on Africa's journey in the Middle East tourism space, Dindar noted that the continent has come a long way over the past decade.

"It's hard to believe that we are almost 10 years from the last time we spoke about the Middle East and the potential of the Middle East market," he said. "At the time, it was a very difficult sell to promote Africa as a whole, because the perception of Africa in the Middle East market was not that strong."

He explained that Africa was once viewed through a narrow and often negative lens, particularly around issues of infrastructure, safety and overall tourism readiness. However, sustained engagement with travel trade partners, embassies, consulates and airline partners such as Emirates, Qatar Airways and South African Airways has helped to reshape those perceptions.

"Over the 10 years, with a lot of hard work and support from our travel trade partners in the market, there's been a huge shift for Africa itself," Dindar observed. "Africa has a kaleidoscope of offering to the Middle Eastern traveller."

According to Dindar, one of Africa's strongest advantages in the GCC market is cultural affinity. He believes Middle Eastern travellers feel at ease on the continent due to its diversity and deeply rooted hospitality.

"From a cultural perspective, Africa is a melting pot of different cultures and religions," he explained. "The Middle East traveller feels very comfortable travelling into Africa, and they feel very warmly welcomed."

He added that Africa's approach to tourism is defined by sincerity and care. "We have the innate nature of being able to take care of the Middle East tourism and offering service from the heart," he said.

Dindar emphasised that destinations seeking to attract Middle Eastern travellers must adapt to evolving consumer trends. Social media, he said, plays a critical role in destination choice and perception.

"Social media is an integral part of being able to showcase key destinations," he said, adding that clear messaging around infrastructure, safety, connectivity and airlift is equally important.

Despite the rise in digital research, Dindar stressed that the Middle East remains a trade-driven market. "They are still trained to book via travel trade partners," he noted. "Frontline staff need to be trained a lot more on Africa – its offerings and what we have as a continent."

Strategic rationale for Africa Showcase Middle East

The Africa Showcase Middle East was conceived to address a clear gap in the market. Dindar said Middle Eastern travel agents are actively seeking new products and partners, yet Africa remains underrepresented.

"The travel trade across the Middle East is really looking for new product, new partners and new experiences," he said. "Africa Showcase is the perfect platform."

He explained that the inaugural edition has been carefully curated to feature top-quality African products, ranging from three-star to five-star offerings. "Africa is still mainly thought of as a safari destination, yet we have so much more to offer – beaches, culture, shopping, city experiences and more."

Central to the Showcase's value proposition is face-to-face engagement. "The key thing is to be able to have personalised meetings," Dindar said. "That's what Africa Showcase brings."

For its first edition, Africa Showcase Middle East will focus on Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, with plans to expand to Saudi Arabia in subsequent years.

"The reason we've gone with two countries for now is timing," Dindar explained, citing the pre-Ramadan window and competing



global travel commitments for exhibitors.

He also highlighted strong air connectivity as a decisive factor. "Qatar Airways, with its relationship with Rwanda, Flydubai's access into East Africa, and carriers like Emirates, SAA and Qatar Airways into Southern Africa make these markets strategically right."

Visa accessibility further strengthened the case. "Qatari and UAE nationals do not require visas for South Africa," he noted, describing these markets as "low-hanging fruit" for African tourism businesses.

Addressing the suitability of African products for GCC travellers, Dindar expressed confidence in the continent's ability to cater for diverse segments. While family and multi-generational travel remains strong, new trends are emerging.

"We're seeing solo female travellers coming in from the Middle East, honeymoon travel is on the rise, as well as young professionals and solo travellers," he revealed.

Africa, he said, is uniquely positioned to cater for these varied needs, from tranquil safari lodges to vibrant urban experiences in destinations such as Cape Town, Johannesburg, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

Dindar also urged destination marketing organisations (DMOs) to rethink traditional approaches when targeting the GCC.

"The Middle East market is unique, and the key thing is building relationships," he said. "Generic marketing and above-the-line advertising is not really the answer."

He emphasised the importance of being present on the ground, forging strong trade and airline partnerships, and investing in knowledge-building. "When the frontline staff have confidence and knowledge about Africa, it becomes an easy sell," he said.

Expressing optimism about the impact of the inaugural Showcase, Dindar maintained, "Some of our exhibitors will be going into the Middle East for the very first time. It's going to be an exciting week, and we're looking forward to showcasing Africa to Middle East travellers."



Namibia Convention Bureau launched to position Destination as Business Events Hub

Namibia has taken a decisive step toward strengthening its position in the global meetings and events industry with the official launch of the Namibia Convention Bureau (NCB). Unveiled in Windhoek on Tuesday, the new body will serve as the central coordinating agency to market the country as a competitive destination for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE), with the launch officiated by Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, Hon. Indileni Daniel.

Following Cabinet approval in September 2023, the NCB was established to diversify Namibia's tourism sector and unlock new opportunities in the high-value MICE space. The initiative aligns with the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan (2022-2024), the National Spatial Tourism Master Plan (2025-2035), and the Government's overall objective to create 500,000 jobs across various sectors of the economy. The NCB is currently hosted under the Namibia Investment Promotion and Development Board (NIPDB) during its incubation period, until the sector matures to support an independent bureau. The NCB will serve as Namibia's official point of contact for event organisers bringing international



meetings, incentives, conferences and events/exhibitions to the country, and will amongst others coordinate national bidding for international conferences, support event logistics, and administer the MICE Visa programme.

Speaking at the launch, NIPDB CEO, Dr. Nangula Nelulu Uaandja highlighted that the establishment of the Convention Bureau represents a strategic milestone in Namibia's economic diversification journey. "The MICE sector is not just about events, it is about unlocking new

pathways for investment, trade, and tourism," said Nelulu Uaandja adding that "when global decision-makers come to Namibia for conferences and exhibitions, they don't only consume services; they build relationships, explore business opportunities, and ultimately invest in our economy."

Officially launching the NCB, Hon. Indileni Daniel, stated that the launch is a demonstration of Namibia's readiness to compete in the global business events market. The Minister further called for collaboration between the government and the private sector to grow the MICE industry, empower MSMEs, and contribute to national economic diversification.

"The government has shown its commitment by modernising legislation, streamlining processes, and even introducing the MICE Visa to ease delegate entry. But success depends on partnership. We invite investors, venue owners, hotel developers, service providers, and entrepreneurs to join us in building a world-class Namibian MICE experience. Namibia needs state-of-the-art conference centres, expanded accommodation capacity, modern technology infrastructure, creative

www.ncb.com.na



sector services, and professional event organisers," said Hon. Daniel.

Since June this year, the NCB has facilitated 1,186 MICE visa applications, with 978 visas issued and generating close to N\$1,5 million in revenue.

In 2025 alone, Namibia hosted 22 MICE events, creating employment opportunities while stimulating economic activity in the country. These events, which included the Global African Hydrogen Summit, Namibia Oil and Gas Conference, and

Africa Infrastructure Finance Summit attracted over 2000 delegates and injected over N\$23 million directly into the local economy. Further to that, these events also delivered tangible benefits to local businesses, particularly those in hospitality, transport, catering, event management, printing, tour operations and retail supply chains amongst others, highlighting the role of MICE as a significant driver of economic activity and employment creation for Namibia.

The NCB invites Namibian businesses

to register as service providers, including operators in hospitality, event management, audiovisual services and exhibition stand construction. The full list of services is available on the NCB website (www.ncb.com.na).

Following the official launch, the NCB's 2026 strategic goals include developing a comprehensive global marketing strategy, as well as developing and implementing MICE policies and regulatory frameworks through targeted workshops, amongst others.

SA Tourism appoints Corne Koch as Chief Convention Bureau Officer

South African Tourism (SA Tourism) has announced the appointment of Ms Corne Koch as its new Chief Convention Bureau Officer, who will head the South African National Convention Bureau (SANCB) business unit, which effective 1 December 2025.

A vital and strategic business unit within SA Tourism, the SANCB plays a central role in positioning the country as a world-class destination for domestic, regional and international MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions/ events). With a clear mandate to attract MICE events, the SANCB supports economic growth, sector transformation, and sustained global competitiveness, ensuring South Africa remains a preferred destination for business events.

The business events sector is a key priority for SA Tourism, and the SANCB continues to deliver strong results. In the first two quarters of 2025 alone, the Bureau secured 35 bids, contributing more than R415 million to the economy and attracting nearly 16,000 delegates to South Africa, underscoring the critical role the SANCB plays in driving industry development and broader economic impact.

Ms Koch steps into this national leadership role to steer the ship forward as South Africa prepares to host a growing number of major business events, including the G20 Leaders' Summit, further amplifying the country's visibility and competitiveness on the world stage.

She joins SA Tourism bringing more than 20 years of experience in tourism destination marketing and promotion across South Africa. Most recently,

she served as Head of the Cape Town and Western Cape Convention Bureau at Wesgro, where she led a high-performing team responsible for positioning the Western Cape as Africa's top business-events destination.

Commenting on her appointment, Ms Koch said: "Business events are powerful drivers of economic and knowledge growth for a destination, extending far beyond tourism. Our industry thrives because of passionate professionals across government, academia and industry who contribute to the growth of this sector. I am honoured to join the South African National Convention Bureau and to continue its role in strengthening South Africa as the continent's premier home for business events."

A passionate advocate for the economic power of business events, Koch has been instrumental in driving the growth of meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) in the Western Cape. Her expertise spans programme and project management, strategic partnerships, event strategy, and fostering productive relationships with a diverse network of global stakeholders.

Speaking on the appointment, Darryl Erasmus, Acting CEO and COO at SA Tourism, said: "Strengthening leadership within our organisation is vital as we move into a defining era for South African Tourism. The appointment of our new Chief Convention Bureau Officer demonstrates our commitment to building a strong, capable, and visionary executive team. Her leadership comes at an ideal time as we prepare for the 20th edition of Meetings Africa in February 2025 and Africa's Travel Indaba in May



2026, two flagship events that showcase the best of Africa's tourism and business events sectors."

South Africa continues to demonstrate its capability as a trusted and world-class host for major global gatherings. The country's diverse tourism offering, from vibrant urban centres and award-winning convention precincts to breathtaking natural landscapes positions it as a destination that seamlessly blends business efficiency with memorable leisure experiences.

This week, South Africa is proudly exhibiting at IBTM World 2025, showcasing the strength, readiness, and innovation of its business events industry to global buyers and partners. In just a few days, South Africa will again take centre stage as it hosts the G20 Leaders' Summit, another powerful proof point of the country's capacity, reliability, and excellence as a premier global events host.

IBTM World 2025 breaks records and redefines the business events landscape

IBTM World 2025 closed on an extraordinary high, delivering the most innovative, immersive, and commercially impactful edition in its history. The show floor saw nearly 12,000 participants from around the world come together for three days of breakthrough ideas, experiential activations, and a record 79,000+ pre-scheduled meetings, an 8% rise on 2024.

This year's edition set new benchmarks across the board:

- Almost 2,500 exhibitors – one of the highest exhibitor turnouts ever.
- 12% rise in returning participants, reflecting the value for buyers and suppliers.
- 49% of Hosted Buyers attending from outside Europe, signalling IBTM's growing global impact.

Elva Yañez, MICE Manager, Promperu, said: "As a brand we have come back to IBTM World after 10 years and this is my first time personally attending. It is one of our most successful events of the year, with lots of great meetings with suppliers and buyers. I thought I would meet mainly people from Spain, which is one of our primary markets, but I have also made great connections with people from across Europe, Asia and Latin America which I didn't expect. I am looking forward to coming back to IBTM World in 2026."

Heather McNee, Corporate & Incentive Manager at VisitScotland Business Events, said: "It's incredible to be back at IBTM World. Our Scottish partners have enjoyed the show with a great variety of high-quality appointments. We are delighted to return to Scotland with a fantastic mix of leads and exciting new connections."

Felicia Asiedu, Marketing Director, Cvent, said: "IBTM World is one of our tier one shows – we always come with full force. I love the fact that this year there is a bright tech space with all the providers close to us and we're right next to the Future Stage, which makes sense. This is an ecosystem place for us, and we are an ecosystem supplier. So that's hotels, destinations, CVBs, event planners, marketers, everyone really, all in one place. The quality really has been good."

A new era of innovation and experience design

This year IBTM World lived up to its People. Power. Potential theme, debuting IBTM Ignite, a bold new platform connecting over 80 start-ups with investors, advisors, and industry leaders. From AI-driven engagement tools to sustainability-focused tech, IBTM Ignite showcased the trailblazers set to shape the next decade of events.

Meanwhile, the show unveiled the Future Stage, home to rapid-fire innovation talks from emerging leaders, and the BEFuture Pavilion, where investors and creators came together to fuel the industry breakthroughs of tomorrow.

Immersive features that pushed boundaries

Returning by popular demand, Exceptional Experiences once again drew in-house planners and marketers eager to learn from world-leading brands such as WeTransfer, Canva, Shutterstock, Amazon and UTA. The result was a packed theatre and a wealth of practical, creative strategies for designing unforgettable experiences.

IBTM World 2025 also welcomed back its most successful features from 2024, including The Hotel Pavilion – a dedicated space for independent and small group hotels to showcase their offering.

The Forum for Advocacy, in partnership with The Business of Events, cemented IBTM World as the epicentre for global conversation, collaboration, and change in the meetings and events industry. Advocacy leaders and policymakers emphasised the urgency of unified messaging and storytelling to unlock the full societal value of business events.

This year's Association Leaders Forum, sponsored by Excel London and designed in partnership with ESAE (European Society of Association Executives), examined the role of Association events in building strong communities.



A conference programme that ignited minds

IBTM World 2025 delivered its strongest conference programme to date, packed with insights that attendees could take straight back to their organisations and headlined by a trio of powerhouse speakers:

- Nathalie Nahai on empathy and connection in the age of AI
- B. Joseph Pine II on designing experiences that drive emotional and economic value
- David Osgathorp on unlocking human potential through performance and wellbeing

Driving industry intelligence

The show saw the launch of several significant research pieces, including the IBTM World Trends Report, highlighting how older demographics are shaping future event design; The Hague & Partners' bleisure study; and Access All Areas, a groundbreaking accessibility report uncovering the industry's most urgent gaps.

A show that exceeded all expectations

Claudia Hall, Exhibition Director of IBTM World, said: "IBTM World 2025 has been nothing short of extraordinary. We delivered our most ambitious, international, and impactful edition yet – and the response from the global events community has been phenomenal. From record-breaking meetings to powerful new initiatives like IBTM Ignite and the expansion of Exceptional Experiences, this year proved that innovation thrives when people come together. The show floor was buzzing with energy, ideas, and opportunity."

The 2026 edition of IBTM World will take place from 17-19 November in Barcelona.

ILTM Africa eyes bigger 2026 edition following transformational year

ILTM Africa is gearing up for a significantly expanded and more immersive 2026 edition, following what organisers describe as a transformative year for the continent's premier luxury travel trade show. Speaking on the VA Tourism Podcast hosted by Kojo Bentum-Williams, ILTM Africa Sales Manager Larnese Carstens reflected on the event's evolution, its growing impact on African tourism businesses, and what exhibitors and buyers can expect next year.

Carstens explained that ILTM Africa is deliberately focused on the high-end segment of tourism. "We specifically focus on the luxury sector rather than the broader spectrum of tourism as a whole," she said. "So, we showcase luxury product which includes experiences, it includes some of our local African DMCs, it of course includes various game lodges, city hotels, etc. Anything that falls within the luxury sector that can be booked outside of Africa as an inbound product is what we showcase at the show."

She added that the event is intentionally Africa-focused, attracting buyers who are committed to selling the continent. "We want to get people here who are interested in Africa, who want to sell Africa, and that is specifically what we're about," Carstens noted, revealing that from 2026 the show will also

incorporate selected Middle Eastern luxury products for the first time, while maintaining its core African identity.

Reflecting on the appeal of luxury tourism in Africa, Carstens said the continent continues to challenge outdated stereotypes. "There is this magical Africa idea out there, which I think we fully live up to," she said. "But we're also showcasing that the luxury sector doesn't just have to be about extravagance. It is about the experiences, it is about the storytelling, it is about people making an impactful difference in terms of sustainability and uplifting local communities."

According to her, Africa excels at redefining luxury. "Luxury can be about so much more than the thread count of your linen or how many staff you have per person who stays, and I think that's what we do really well in Africa."

Carstens highlighted 2025 as a pivotal year, marked by the show's move to the Norval Foundation in Cape Town. "The show was really transformed by a move to the Norval Foundation, which is an art foundation, and it's the first time ever that the show was held there instead of a more traditional conferencing space," she said. "It elevated the experience, it allowed for growth on the show floor, and it brought a fresh focus and new energy to the event."



Larnese Carstens, ILTM Africa Sales Manager

The tabletop, one-to-one format will remain central in 2026. "When you meet with your pre-selected appointments, it is a one-on-one interaction for 20 minutes long across the tabletop," Carstens explained. "It is very intimate, and that intimacy, along with the exclusiveness of the art foundation, is very much what we want to bring to the show."

On tangible outcomes, she shared a powerful example of business impact. "A DMC was selected as the buyer's preferred DMC on the ground, and it actually means that she has to employ six additional staff to grow the business," Carstens said. "That's the kind of interaction we really want to bring about—sustainable growth, not just a flash in the pan."

ILTM Africa 2026 is expected to host around 85 exhibitors, up from approximately 63 in 2025, alongside a matched number of hosted buyers. The programme will also feature strong sustainability-driven activations, including an art and conservation partnership with Painted Wolf Wines and an awareness campaign supporting the critically endangered African penguin in collaboration with SANCCOB.

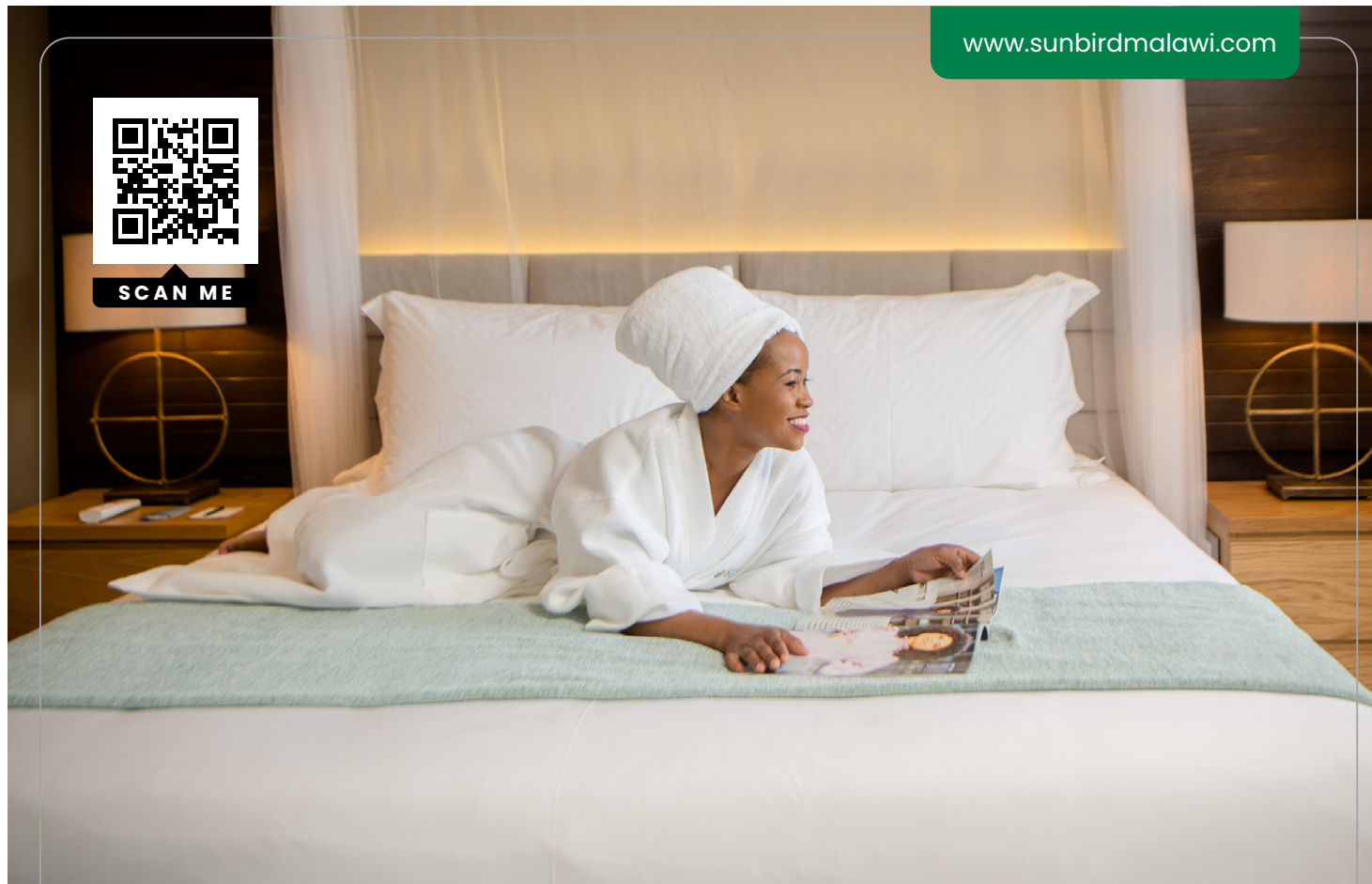
"We really believe it's going to be one to blow all the previous ones out of the water," Carstens concluded, expressing confidence that ILTM Africa 2026 will further cement the continent's position as a global leader in meaningful, sustainable luxury travel.



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Tourism in Balance: ITB Berlin Convention 2026 Leads the Way

ITB Berlin is celebrating 60 years, and under the guiding theme "Leading Tourism into Balance", the world's largest industry think tank will focus on the key questions shaping the future of global tourism. From 3 to 5 March 2026, around 400 leading international speakers will discuss on four stages across 17 theme tracks how sustainable business models can function while respecting the natural environment.

ITB Berlin Convention this year will look for answers and strategies for a tourism industry in transition. More than 400 international speakers will examine the latest trends, present research findings and scenarios, and debate strategies and options for taking action. Experts from major companies such as Nathan Blecharczyk (co-founder and Chief Strategy Officer, Airbnb), Mitra Sorrells (Senior Vice President, Phocuswright) and Bruce Poon Tip (founder, G Adventures) will share exclusive insights into current market developments and strategic trends. Frauke Fischer (business biodiversity expert) will explain why biodiversity is a key success factor for the future of the travel industry, while Thor Pedersen (globetrotter and bestseller author) will take the audience on an extraordinary journey around the world without flying, opening up completely new perspectives on global travel.

AI, overtourism and climate change require action

Taking as its slogan 'Leading Tourism

into Balance' and featuring 17 theme tracks on four stages, the ITB Berlin Convention 2026 will address an industry facing increasingly complex issues and the need to balance all kinds of demands. How are destinations handling overtourism? What opportunities do data management and AI offer? To what degree is climate adaptation required? Today's challenges call for innovative concepts that involve a wide range of stakeholders and targets while reconciling differing standpoints.

In-depth analyses with a practical value

The ITB Transition Lab events offer a detailed analysis of current corporate strategies, with a newly expanded programme following the positive reactions last year. Among other things, participants will focus on the importance of indices and key performance indicators (KPIs) and discuss how they can be evaluated for practical purposes. Tickets are now available in the ITB Berlin ticket shop. The new ITB Deep Dives offer an in-depth analysis of the latest topics. This format is where new ideas are tested, ways of thinking are questioned and innovative solutions are developed – in order to produce concrete ideas and takeaways that will be of value to participants long after the event.

A wider range of topics and new partners

For the hotel and hospitality industry, the ITB Berlin Convention 2026 is

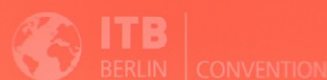
also expanding its programme: The Hospitality Track kicks off on ITB Tuesday on the Green Stage, continues in the afternoon, and offers an in-depth analysis of the latest developments and innovations on the eTravel Stage in the Hospitality Tech Track. Experts including Thomas Hertkorn (Head of Online Marketing, a&o Hostels) and Renée Nicole Wagner (Corporate Director, Orascom Hotels Management AG) will highlight the latest industry developments.

With Airbnb as Official Premium Partner of ITB Berlin, additional contributions and perspectives will form part of the hospitality track, while Peru, the Adventure Travel Partner, will present its tourism potential at the convention.

Focus on LGBTQ traveller analysis

Diversity and tolerance in the travel industry remain important issues, ones which the ITB Berlin Convention 2026 will continue to discuss next year at various events and the Diversity & Inclusion Track.

For the second time ITB Berlin, together with the travel risk management service provider A3M Global Monitoring and Diversity Tourism, is conducting a market survey on the risks to LGBTQ travellers, which investigates the personal views and experiences of this target group at travel destinations. The link to the survey, which is taking place from December to April, can be found at: Survey.Lamapoll.ITB_LGBTQPlus_survey_2025_2026



93% of disabled delegates face barriers at events, new report exposes accessibility gap

Launched on November 18, 2025 at IBTM World, the report – Access All Areas: Closing the Accessibility Gap in Events – exposes a striking disparity between how venues perceive their accessibility provision and how delegates truly experience it.

Drawing on insights from 1,000 delegates who have attended an event within the last six months, the research discovered that nearly one in three identified as having a visible or non-visible disability, and of those, 93% reported encountering barriers to participation.

These included inaccessible layouts (28%); lack of accessible toilets (24%); untrained staff (25%); overstimulating environments (27%); and missing accessibility information (17%).

Over 100 venues were also surveyed. While 82% said they provide step-free access, 91% reported having accessible toilets, and 75% claimed their staff have disability awareness training, the findings suggest a disconnect between venue confidence and delegate experience. More than half (57%) of venues said they have a formal accessibility or inclusion policy in place.

However, cost remains a major point of contention. Nearly half (46%) of venues admitted they sometimes charge for accessibility adjustments such as gender-neutral toilets or ramped stages – a practice delegates overwhelmingly reject as discriminatory. Attendees regard accessibility as a fundamental right not an optional, paid-for extra.

Developed with the support of accessibility consultant Dr Shani Dhanda, the research explores 12 themes, including policies and legislation, physical access, sensory needs, communication, training, and technology. Each reveals consistent pattern: while venues often report confidence in their measures, delegates continue to face barriers limiting full participation. After each disconnect is explained, Dr Shani Dhanda provides



recommendations for bridging the accessibility gap.

"This research deserves real applause – it's not just a report, it's a rallying cry for progress. The first of its kind, it shines a light on a truth we can no longer ignore – accessibility is still too often seen as optional, when in reality, it benefits everyone," said Dr Shani Dhanda.

She added: "The findings call for bold, lasting change. The time for quick fixes and reactive adjustments is over. Accessibility must be woven into every stage of design and delivery. By listening to those with lived experiences, embedding inclusive thinking, and striving for continuous improvement, the UK events industry can set a global benchmark for true inclusion."

The report also sets out ten clear industry recommendations and a pathway to compliance with the European Accessibility Act (EAA), which came into force in June 2025.

Craig Bingham, Managing Director, ICC Wales, said: "Accessibility must sit at the heart of every event – and at ICC Wales,

it genuinely does. We believe inclusive design should be a baseline expectation, not a bolt-on or a budget decision.

"From ensuring step-free access and gender-neutral facilities to embedding disability awareness training across our team, our approach is about removing barriers before they arise. We've worked closely with organisers to make sure every delegate can take part fully and comfortably – and the feedback we've received shows the real impact this makes.

"This report reinforces the urgency for collective action across the sector. True progress means moving beyond compliance and cost discussions, and towards a shared responsibility to make every event accessible by default."

Mike Fletcher, Director of News & Content at The Business of Events, said: "The data reveals a real disconnect between venue intent and delegate experience. By sharing these findings openly, we hope to spark collaboration across the sector and turn good intentions into meaningful change."

Africa's Business Events Sector Closes 2025 on a High, with Strategic Outlook in 2026

Africa's meetings and business events sector is taking stock of a period marked by steady delivery, renewed confidence, and clearer continental alignment as the year draws to a close. In South Africa, 2025 has been defined by scale and consistency, while across the continent, several destinations have taken visible steps to strengthen their presence in the global MICE economy.

Speaking on the VoyagesAfriq Tourism Podcast, Glenton de Kock, Chief Executive Officer of the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI), described 2025 as "not only successful but extremely busy," noting South Africa's hosting of the G20 alongside a full calendar of trade exhibitions and association meetings.

"We've delivered a significant number of events this year," he said. "As we approach the end of the calendar, it's also a moment to pause briefly, recharge, and prepare for an early activation in January."

Beyond South Africa, de Kock pointed to a growing sense of momentum across Africa's meetings landscape. He highlighted the reactivation of the Kenya Convention Bureau, increased activity in Namibia and Mozambique, and Ethiopia's continued assertiveness in the space.

"What has been most encouraging is not just new destinations coming on board, but the way the private sector is mobilising and starting to move in a more unified direction," he said. "That collective voice is becoming clearer."

According to de Kock, the past two years have been particularly important in giving Africa's meetings and events industry greater confidence in articulating its value, both economically and socially. He stressed that accessibility, especially air connectivity within the continent, remains one of the most pressing challenges as Africa looks to compete more effectively on the global stage.

"Access to destinations is central," he noted. "We've spoken about air access for years, but the industry is now more



vocal and more coordinated in pushing that agenda."

The conversation also turned to Meetings Africa, the continent's flagship MICE trade show, which will mark its 20th edition in February 2026. Launched two decades ago, the event has grown into a central platform for connecting African destinations with global buyers, suppliers, and associations.

"From the beginning, there was a clear sense that Africa needed its own dedicated trade platform," de Kock said. "Meetings Africa has allowed us to showcase not only destinations and products, but also African professionals and capabilities."

Scheduled to take place from 23 to 25 February in Johannesburg, the 2026 edition is expected to place renewed emphasis on inclusivity, reflection, and future positioning. Among the proposed highlights is a consolidated opening-day gathering bringing together buyers, exhibitors, associations, and partners.

"It's an opportunity to pause, reflect on how far we've come, and collectively set the tone for where we want to go," he explained.

Policy alignment was another key theme of the discussion. While acknowledging the importance of government frameworks, de Kock argued that

sustained progress depends heavily on an organised and engaged private sector.

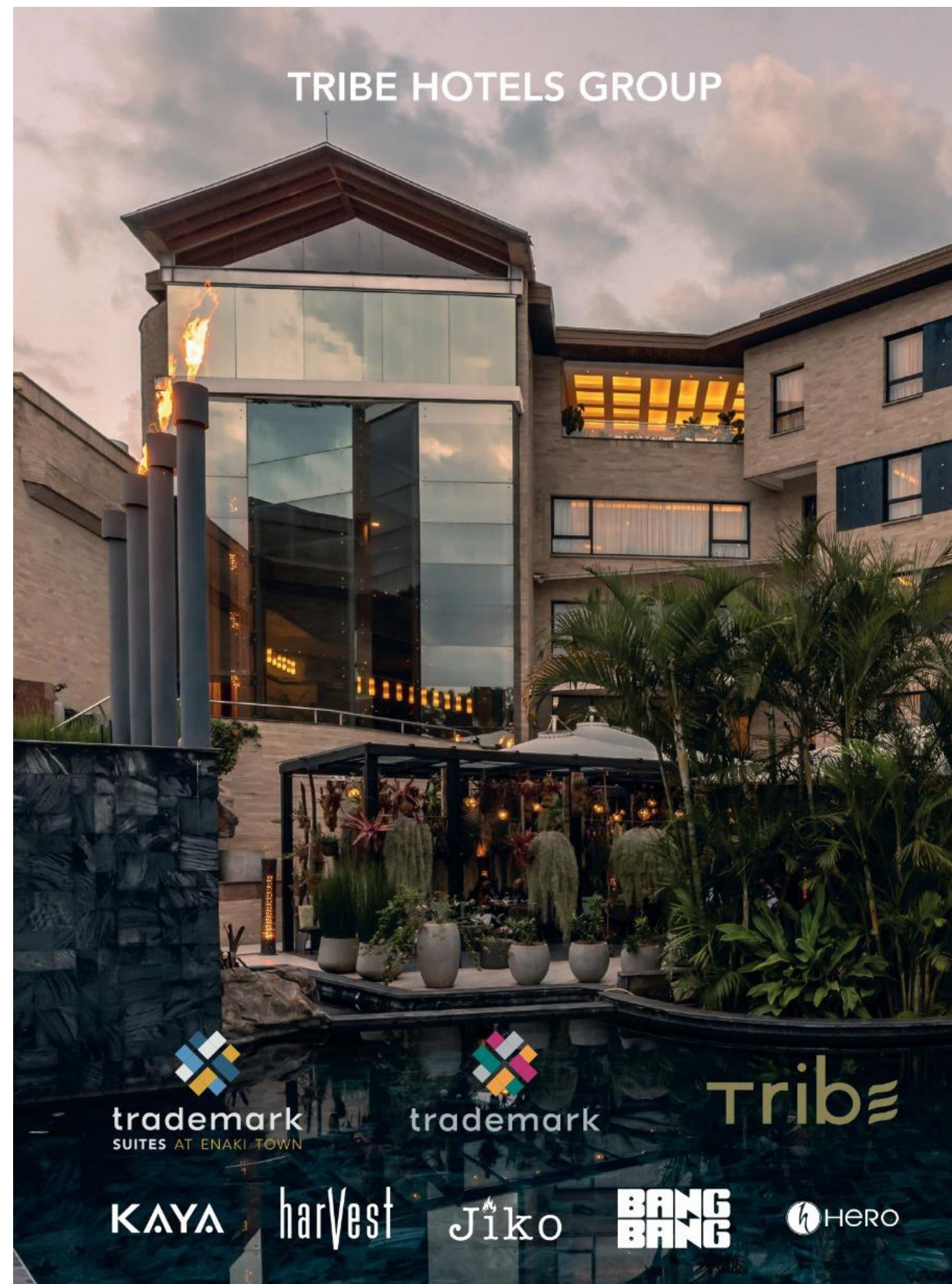
"Policy matters, but it must be informed by those delivering on the ground," he said. "In South Africa, the evolution of the meetings industry has been shaped by strong private sector leadership working in partnership with government."

Looking ahead, Meetings Africa 2026 will also place a stronger focus on youth engagement and mentorship. Plans are underway to introduce structured sessions for emerging professionals ahead of the main programme, aimed at helping them better understand the industry ecosystem and build meaningful connections.

"If we don't actively bring young people through, we risk losing institutional knowledge over time," de Kock said. "Creating platforms that support mentorship is no longer optional."

As Africa closes out 2025, the picture that emerges is one of cautious confidence. With clearer coordination, growing institutional capacity, and platforms like Meetings Africa anchoring continental engagement, attention is now firmly on how these gains translate into stronger positioning in 2026 and beyond.

"From the beginning, there was a clear sense that Africa needed its own dedicated trade platform. Meetings Africa has allowed us to showcase not only destinations and products, but also African professionals and capabilities."



Kenya Airways announces leadership transition

Kenya Airways has announced a change in its top leadership, with Group Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Allan Kilavuka set to exit the airline. Kilavuka will proceed on terminal leave ahead of the expiry of his contract, bringing to an end six years at the helm of the national carrier.

During his tenure, Mr. Kilavuka steered Kenya Airways with commitment and resilience through the turbulent COVID-19 period, implementing effective cost-saving measures and strategic initiatives that safeguarded the airline's operational viability. He subsequently oversaw growth in revenues, passenger numbers, and freight volumes, reaffirming the airline's sustainability and competitiveness.

The Board and management of Kenya Airways express their sincere gratitude to Mr. Kilavuka for his diligence, service, and leadership, and wish him every success in his future endeavours.

To ensure a smooth transition, the Board has appointed Captain George Kamal, the Company's Chief Operating Officer (COO), as Acting GMD/CEO effective 16 December 2025. The Board will concurrently initiate a competitive recruitment process to appoint a



Allan Kilavuka, Group Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer

substantive successor.

Captain Kamal is a distinguished aviation executive with over 29 years of leadership experience across the Middle East and African markets. Rising from frontline operations to the C-suite, he has led the transformation of several airlines through senior executive roles, most recently serving as Operations Director at Air Arabia and Chief Operations & Executive Officer at Iraqi Airways. He holds a Doctorate in Business Administration and an MSc in Aviation Management, with expertise in innovation, digitalisation, and advanced aviation systems.



Captain George Kamal, the Company's Chief Operating Officer (COO)

The Board commits to support Captain Kamal as he assumes executive leadership during this interim period.

Looking ahead, the Board remains focused on completing the ongoing turnaround strategy of the airline, whose primary objective is to secure operational reliability, sustainability, and growth ambitions. This strategy includes the search for a suitable strategic investor, with the support of shareholders.

The Board takes this opportunity to thank all stakeholders for their continued support.

LATAM expands long-haul network with new São Paulo–Cape Town Service

LATAM Brazil has announced a major international network expansion for 2026, confirming the launch of a direct route between São Paulo–Guarulhos and Cape Town, scheduled to commence in September 2026 with three weekly flights operated using Boeing 787 aircraft. The new Cape Town service was unveiled alongside additional intercontinental links to Amsterdam, beginning April 2026, and Brussels, beginning June 2026, each to be flown three times weekly from Guarulhos.

The Cape Town route materially strengthens LATAM's South African exposure, adding a second direct South America–South Africa connection to supplement existing services to Johannesburg. Scheduled to operate with 787 equipment, the São Paulo–Cape Town flights will form part of LATAM's broader strategy to expand long-haul connectivity from its São Paulo hub, and to offer improved access between Latin America and key African markets.

Johannesburg remains a strategic node for LATAM's African operations. The carrier resumed São Paulo–

Johannesburg services in July 2023, and subsequently increased frequencies to meet demand, establishing the route as a regular long-haul link between Brazil and southern Africa. LATAM's Johannesburg operation also underpins commercial partnerships and onward connectivity across the region.

Jerome Cadier, CEO of LATAM Brazil, framed the expansion as the product of commercial analysis and market demand, noting that the announced routes "have undergone responsible analysis and make sense for both real travel demand and our business strategy." The airline confirmed that international operations will be flown with the 787, reflecting a fleet and network plan calibrated for long-haul markets.

For South Africa, the introduction of a direct São Paulo–Cape Town service is significant. Cape Town offers diversified tourism and business demand distinct from Johannesburg, and the new link will provide direct market access for travellers and freight between Brazil's largest aviation hub and South Africa's southwestern gateway. The additional



capacity may also facilitate broader commercial ties and tourism flows between the two countries.

The new São Paulo–Cape Town service is scheduled to begin in September 2026, operating three times weekly on Boeing 787 aircraft, with Amsterdam and Brussels services commencing April and June 2026 respectively. Domestic additions to Uberaba, Juiz de Fora, Caldas Novas and Campina Grande will bring LATAM's Brazilian airport network to 63 destinations, while international reach from Brazil will expand to 28 direct markets.

Ethiopian Airlines breaks ground on Bishoftu International Airport Project

Ethiopian Airlines Group, Africa's largest airline, has begun construction of Bishoftu International Airport after an official groundbreaking ceremony. The historic event was graced by His Excellency Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, ministers, high level government officials, industry leaders, stakeholders, and Ethiopian Airlines executives.

Ethiopian also unveiled the airport's design and highlighted the successful completion of the resettlement and livelihood restoration project for the affected communities of the project area. F.D.R.E Prime Minister, His Excellency Dr. Abiy Ahmed alongside high-level government officials, and Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO, Mr. Mesfin Tasew, placed the plaque marking the official commencement of the construction.

Reflecting on the groundbreaking ceremony, Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO Mr. Mesfin Tasew remarked: "This is truly a proud moment for Ethiopian Airlines and for all of Africa. We are embarking on a new chapter with the groundbreaking of Bishoftu International Airport that will redefine the continent's aviation ecosystem. As we celebrate 80 years of service, this project stands as yet another milestone, underscoring our commitment to shaping the future of the African air transport industry, while supporting the



growing demand for our passenger and cargo services. Bishoftu International Airport is a major step towards addressing the infrastructural gap in Africa and a key player in implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and at Ethiopian we are committed to realize the completion of this project."

In his remarks, Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed described the day as a milestone in Ethiopia's journey toward modernization and prosperity. He noted that Ethiopian Airlines is a source of national pride, not because it has been free of challenges, but because of its resilience, its ability to overcome obstacles, and its role as a trailblazer for Africa. He emphasized that the airline's greatest strength lies in its strong

corporate culture, built on: Giving priority to safety and security, leadership driven by creativity and hard work, a workforce of over 26,000 employees who believe in the airline as their flag carrier and honor what it represents, a continuous commitment to learning and capacity building.

Bishoftu International Airport stands as a defining project for both Ethiopian and African aviation, facilitating trade, tourism, and people-to-people interactions within Africa and beyond. Phase One of the project is expected to be completed by 2030 and will accommodate 60 million passengers annually and when fully completed it will have the capacity to handle 110 million passengers.



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TAAG Angola Airlines and South African Airways Expand Connectivity with New Codeshare Agreement

TAAG Angola Airlines and South African Airways (SAA) proudly announce a strategic codeshare agreement to enhance regional and intercontinental connectivity. This partnership strengthens the networks of both airlines, leveraging Luanda, Johannesburg, and Cape Town as key hubs for seamless travel across Africa and beyond.

Both airlines have worked tirelessly on system integration to ensure smooth implementation. Ticket sales are open for booking and travel commenced on 17 November 2025.

The codeshare agreement will enable both airlines to expand their networks by sharing routes and offering passengers enhanced and seamless connectivity between their key destinations. SAA will add its flight code to TAAG-operated flights from Johannesburg and Cape Town to Luanda, Angola, as well as onward connections from Luanda to Lisbon, Portugal and São Paulo, Brazil. In return, TAAG will gain access to key destinations in SAA's network, including Durban, Gqeberha, Cape Town, Harare,

and Lusaka.

The codeshare agreement enables both airlines to jointly market and sell tickets, broadening their combined route networks and aligning their commercial efforts. As a result, travellers will enjoy a wider selection of destinations, the convenience of purchasing a single ticket in their local currency, and smoother connections with integrated check-in and baggage processes. Overall, this partnership significantly enhances travel flexibility and connectivity across the TAAG and SAA networks.

Beyond enhancing passenger experience, this partnership contributes to intra-African connectivity, supporting trade, tourism, and international relations while facilitating the movement of people and goods.

Nelson Rodrigues de Oliveira, CEO of TAAG, expressed enthusiasm about the collaboration, stating, "This alliance with South African Airways enhances our continental connectivity, opening new international destinations for our customers. It also strengthens Angola's

role as a strategic hub, benefiting our economy and tourism sector. We are thrilled about this partnership, which aligns with our growth strategy and market expansion."

"This partnership marks a significant milestone in African aviation, strengthening connectivity across the continent and creating new opportunities for travelers (leisure and business). By collaborating with TAAG, we are expanding our reach, enhancing passenger experience, and unlocking vital commercial pathways. As South African Airways continues to grow its network, this alliance reinforces our commitment to serving as a bridge between Africa and the world, driving seamless travel, support trade and investment, tourism development, cultural exchange and economic development," said SAA Group CEO, Professor John Lamola.

TAAG Angola Airlines and South African Airways remain committed to delivering exceptional service while advancing regional and global connectivity through this strategic collaboration.





MUSIC, MEMORY AND DIPLOMACY: Inside Sierra Leone's One Nation Reggae Festival

The One Nation Reggae Festival has emerged as a strategic cultural platform within Sierra Leone's tourism and creative economy sector, demonstrating how music and heritage can be aligned to support cultural diplomacy, destination positioning and industry development.

Conceived around reggae's historic association with African identity, resistance and Pan-African consciousness, the festival was designed to extend beyond live performances. Its structure reflected a broader policy direction that places culture at the center of tourism diversification, diaspora engagement and international visibility.

Central to the festival's programme were the Heritage Tours, which took artists, cultural leaders and international delegates through Freetown, Kent, York and Bunce Island. These visits were integral to the festival's concept, transforming historical sites into active spaces of engagement. By situating music within landscapes shaped by transatlantic history, the festival connected creative expression with memory, dialogue and contemporary relevance.

A defining moment within the programme was the Bunce Island All-White Heritage Celebration, which illustrated how curated cultural encounters can bridge continents and generations. Set against one of West Africa's most significant historical landmarks, the gathering underscored the role of heritage tourism in fostering reflection, shared responsibility and deeper international understanding.

Reflecting on the impact of the initiative, Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Hon. Nabeela Farida Tunis, noted that the festival demonstrated "how heritage-led programming can anchor cultural exchange, tourism promotion, and creative industry development." She further observed that the experience positioned Sierra Leone's heritage assets as spaces that continue to inform the country's global narrative.



Evening concerts complemented the heritage programme, bringing together international reggae artists such as Sizzla Kalonji, Christopher Martin, Jah Thunder and Didier Awadi, alongside Sierra Leonean performers and members of the Reggae Union Sierra Leone. The programming balance reinforced cultural exchange while maintaining strong local representation, ensuring that the platform reflected both global reach and national ownership.

Professional development was another core pillar of the festival. Through the Creative Clinic and targeted industry workshops, participants engaged in structured knowledge exchange aimed at strengthening skills, networks and institutional capacity within the creative sector. These sessions aligned cultural expression with enterprise development, reinforcing the creative industries as contributors to economic diversification.

The festival also generated measurable economic activity across hospitality, transport and retail, particularly within Freetown and surrounding communities. More importantly, it laid the groundwork for sustained partnerships across tourism, culture

and international markets. Its alignment with Sierra Leone's Year of Ecotourism 2025 highlighted culture's growing role as a driver of extended stays and differentiated visitor experiences.

Organized by the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs in collaboration with private sector and cultural partners, the festival reflected a coordinated public-private approach increasingly evident across Africa's cultural tourism initiatives. This model underscores the importance of policy support, industry participation and community engagement in delivering credible and sustainable cultural products.

Attention is now focused on consolidating outcomes and scaling heritage-centered experiences. As Minister Tunis observed, the priority is to "strengthen local capacity and position Sierra Leone as a destination where culture, history and creativity intersect with purpose." In this context, the One Nation Reggae Festival stands as more than a music event; it offers a working example of how cultural programming can serve diplomacy, economic development and national storytelling.



Talk is cheap, airfare is not

If we had one dollar for every time the African Union or another regional bloc reiterated its commitment to open skies and easier travel, every African could probably afford the high airfares that remain pervasive across the continent. Alas, words do not pay for fuel, salaries, or landing fees, and African aviation therefore remains mired in a well-meaning but stagnant regulatory regime.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) made headlines in December by vowing to eliminate airport taxes from as soon as the following month. Much jubilation ensued across opinion pages and industry commentary. Reality, however, has proved stubborn and resistant, as is often the case in Africa. Not only do these airport taxes remain firmly in place, but two of the largest markets within ECOWAS are in fact raising the charges levied on air travellers. Nigeria and Ghana are both introducing new security fees, ostensibly to fund Advance Passenger Information System (APIS) initiatives. Despite the publicity around tax elimination, the ECOWAS travelling public will be worse off in 2026 than before. What was announced as tax elimination has simply become tax substitution.

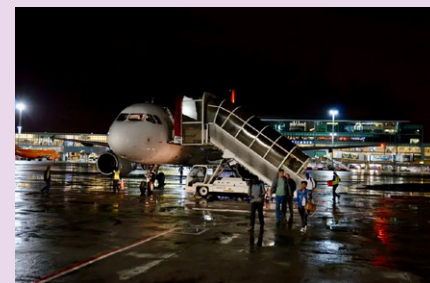
East Africa presents a similar paradox. The East African Community (EAC) frequently promotes its liberalised aviation market and reciprocal ease of access, yet the facts routinely contradict this delusion. Kenya and Tanzania seem to schedule an annual tantrum over some bureaucratic snafu where they ban each other's airlines for a few days, only to kiss and make up in the morning. Despite professed support for the African Union's Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), these markets are often more accommodating to carriers from outside the continent. Nairobi, for example, has seen a significant increase in capacity from Middle Eastern airlines such as Emirates, Etihad, flydubai and Qatar Airways, while Africa's own homegrown behemoth, Ethiopian Airlines, continues to await approval to launch a third daily service, an application now pending for more than three years.

Ethiopia itself is often portrayed as an unqualified success story, and the accomplishments of its national airline are indeed worthy of recognition. However, success of the airline does not automatically translate into success of the wider aviation ecosystem. Ethiopia remains high on IATA's list of countries where airlines are unable to repatriate ticket sale revenues, a problem that disproportionately affects

Africa with seven of the top ten violator nations located on the continent. The consolidation of the airline, airport operator and service providers under the single umbrella of Ethiopian Aviation Holdings may appear efficient on paper, but it also restricts market access through elevated fees and charges for potential competitors. As construction begins on the new mega airport at Bishoftu, there is hope that this signals a more open and competitive future. At present, however, separating Ethiopian Airlines the carrier from Ethiopia the aviation ecosystem remains practically impossible.

Adding to the travel woes for Africans has been Donald Trump's executive orders on immigration which seem to have focused primarily on African countries. Official justification frequently cites high rates of visa overstays and unauthorised work by many African nationals. As of January 2026, more than 60 percent of African citizens are now subject to some form of US travel restriction. These measures range from visa bonds of up to \$15,000 per traveller, to suspension of consular visa processing in certain countries, to outright entry bans for nationals of states such as Sierra Leone, Niger and Equatorial Guinea. The commercial impact is unavoidable. US-Africa traffic is likely to decline sharply in 2026, a year that was previously expected to benefit from strong demand linked to the FIFA World Cup in North America. Routes such as Abidjan to JFK and Atlanta to Addis Ababa may see frequency reductions or outright cancellations, while services to restricted markets such as Nigeria are also likely to be rationalised. Blanket, nationality-based restrictions ultimately punish compliant travellers and airlines far more than they deter abuse.

National airlines will once again dominate headlines across Africa in 2026. Some stories will focus on expansion plans, including South African Airways stated ambition to grow long haul services to China and India, and TAAG Angola's efforts to develop Luanda into a hub from its new Antonio Agostinho Neto International Airport. Others will centre on ambitious resurrection attempts, such as LAM Mozambique's engagement of Knighthood Capital under former Etihad Airways CEO James Hogan. Meanwhile, countries like Namibia and Ghana continue their never-ending sagas to relaunch previously failed national carriers. The uncomfortable reality, however, is that the most newsworthy developments are likely to be fresh financial losses at airlines such as Uganda Airlines, Air Côte d'Ivoire and Air Tanzania. Not all national airlines are



destined to fail, but in Africa, most still will.

Private sector airlines will likely have a more positive outlook, at least for the well managed ones. flySafair will undoubtedly see a seismic change in their ownership structure in 2026, as the clock ticks down on the deadlines set by the regulators to achieve this. Airlink, fresh off its own sale of a minority stake to Qatar Airways, will expand further into Africa with their brand-new Embraer E195-E2 fleet, with markets like Johannesburg to Zanzibar and Cape Town to Lagos likely to be the headline routes. The fastjet group will return to the Mozambique domestic market following an approval of their license in December 2025. Ghana's Africa World Airlines will probably see more regional expansion after a period of post-COVID stagnation amid ownership changes affecting their Chinese shareholders. Nigeria's domestic market will remain chaotic, competitive and full of potential as newer entrants such as United Nigeria and Enugu Air challenge established players Air Peace and Ibom Air for market share.

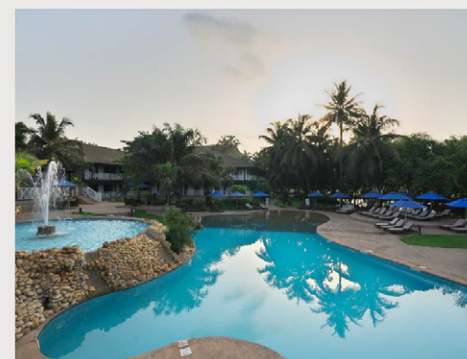
African aviation continues to survive, not because of government policy, but often despite it. As the title suggests, talk is cheap, airfare is not. If regulators and policymakers wish to see genuinely affordable air travel across the continent, they must accept an uncomfortable truth. High airfares in Africa are less a market failure than a deliberate policy choice.



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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UNESCO adds new African Traditions and Music to Intangible Heritage List for December 2025

UNESCO has officially recognized a collection of African cultural traditions and practices, underscoring the continent's rich and diverse heritage. The announcement was made on Wednesday, December 10, 2025, during the 20th session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee in New Delhi, India.

Among the newly inscribed traditions is Ghana's Highlife music and dance, celebrated for its enduring influence on national consciousness and its role in shaping subsequent genres such as hiplife and Afrobeats. Highlife's rhythms, horn arrangements, and storytelling reflect social issues, love, migration, and community life, connecting audiences across generations and social groups.



Highlife music and dance
Ghana

In Chad and Cameroon, the Garuna practice, centered on pastoral, socio-cultural, and artistic retreats around

traditional weddings across Djibouti, Comoros, Mauritania, and Somalia, has been acknowledged for its ceremonial significance and the performative elements that accompany matrimonial celebrations.

Finally, Kenya's Mwazindika spiritual dance of the Daida community has been inscribed for its role in spiritual expression and the preservation of communal identity through music and movement.

This collective recognition by UNESCO not only affirms the cultural value of these traditions but also emphasizes their protection and transmission for future generations. By placing these practices on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, UNESCO ensures that these traditions are safeguarded as integral components of Africa's cultural legacy,



Gifaataa, Wolaita people
New Year festival
Ethiopia

In Madagascar, the Tsapiky musical style, a rhythm characteristic of the south-western region, has been recognized for its distinctive expression and role in communal life. Ethiopia's Gifaataa, the Wolaita people's New Year festival, has been acknowledged for its cultural significance, marking a central celebration in the annual calendar of the community.

Morocco's Caftan, representing arts, traditions, and skills, has been inscribed, highlighting the craftsmanship and cultural symbolism embedded in the creation and use of this traditional garment. Egypt's Koshary, a daily life dish, alongside the practices associated with its preparation and consumption, has also gained recognition for its role in social and culinary culture.



Moroccan Caftan:
art, traditions and skills
Morocco

reinforcing their significance on the global stage.

The 2025 inscriptions serve as a milestone in celebrating Africa's musical, culinary, artisanal, and ceremonial heritage, reflecting the continent's diversity, creativity, and historical depth. These recognitions offer opportunities for cultural preservation, educational engagement, and the promotion of heritage-based tourism, strengthening the visibility and appreciation of Africa's intangible cultural assets worldwide.



Mwazindika spiritual
dance of the Daida
community of Kenya
Kenya

Creatives Connect Afrika concludes with focus on fashion, mobility, finance and digital innovation

The final day of Creatives Connect Afrika saw the continent's creative pulse rise to its most vibrant tempo yet, as the Fashion Runway took centre stage, an electrifying celebration of African artistry, identity and the commercial possibilities of design-led trade.

Twelve designers from across the continent unveiled collections that blended heritage with innovation, each piece reflecting both the cultural depth and the evolving sophistication of Africa's fashion landscape. From modern silhouettes inspired by ancestral motifs to avant-garde reinterpretations of traditional textiles, the runway amplified the creative power shaping Africa's aesthetic influence on the global stage. For many delegates, the showcase was more than a display of craftsmanship, it was a statement of economic potential and a reminder that fashion remains one of the continent's most export-ready creative industries.

Interspersed with musical interludes and performances that kept the audience energized, the momentum flowed seamlessly into a series of sector-defining panel conversations. Discussions explored the practical building blocks required to elevate Africa's creative economy, anchoring the day's proceedings in policy, innovation and trade.

The panel on Mobility for Tourism, Cultural and Creative Professionals examined the pressing need for harmonized visa policies, improved connectivity and streamlined movement



of talent across African borders. Speakers underscored that without mobility, creative collaboration and intra-African trade risk stagnating. They emphasized the role of Agenda 2063 and the Single African Air Transport Market in dismantling long-standing barriers.

Financing the creative ecosystem took centre stage as another panel unpacked the realities and opportunities of building sustainable funding pipelines. From public-private partnerships to blended finance and enterprise development models, panelists highlighted the urgent need for accessible capital that aligns with the unique structures of creative enterprises. The conversation reinforced a sentiment echoed throughout the forum: Africa's creatives must shift toward a trade-first, investment-ready mindset backed by strong intellectual property frameworks.

The digital transformation dialogue widened the lens, exploring AI, VR, streaming, and the gig economy as

accelerators of new business models across film, music, fashion and digital content. Speakers stressed that harnessing technology is no longer optional; it is the gateway for African creators to scale, distribute, and command value in global markets.

As discussions evolved through the day, the Fashion Runway remained the emotional and symbolic heartbeat of the programme, an artistic proof to everything the panels sought to achieve: mobility that enables collaboration, finance that fuels imagination and digital innovation that amplifies Africa's stories worldwide.

Creatives Connect Afrika concluded with a shared understanding that Africa's creative economy stands at an essential moment. With the right frameworks, investment and cross-sector cooperation, the continent's designers, storytellers, musicians and innovators are poised not only to inspire but also to shape global creative futures.



UN Tourism Welcomes TikTok Superstar Khaby Lamé as Ambassador, Recognizing Pivotal Role of Creative Economy

UN Tourism has welcomed Khaby Lamé, the world's most-popular TikTok creator, as its newest Ambassador.

With digital creators and influencers now central to the tourism conversation, the new partnership reflects UN Tourism's commitment to reaching diverse digital-first audiences around the world.

As a UN Tourism Ambassador, Lamé will use his unique platform to promote responsible tourism, support cultural heritage, and advocate for sustainable practices. His work will focus on showcasing the power of tourism as a vehicle for development, job creation, and unity. Lamé's first collaborations with UN Tourism will be announced in the coming weeks, focusing on youth engagement and highlighting "hidden gem" destinations.

UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili says: "Khaby Lamé has brought joy to many millions of people, in every corner of the world, and from every walk of life. His openness and readiness to connect with people across borders and languages represents what tourism is all about. I am proud to announce Lamé as our newest Ambassador."

Khaby Lamé says: "I am incredibly honored to become a UN Tourism Ambassador. My journey started with just a desire to make people smile. Now, I want to use my platform to share my passion for the world, to promote responsible travel, and to build a global community that cares about our planet and the people in it. We (creators) have a huge responsibility. I am excited to start this new adventure and show everyone how we can make the world a better place through travel."

UN Tourism Ambassadors: Voices for Change

UN Tourism Special Ambassadors have a special commitment and closeness to the core values advocated by UN Tourism as a specialized agency of the United Nations, and in particular to the Sustainable Development Goals.

UN Tourism's Ambassadors are drawn from the worlds of sport, entertainment, business, gastronomy and more. All leaders in their respective fields, they volunteer their time and their voices to amplifying the message of tourism for sustainable development and equal opportunity. Over recent years, the number of Ambassadors has

continued to grow to reflect the sector's significance and diversity.

The announcement was made during the Organization's General Assembly, taking place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

“ I am incredibly honored to become a UN Tourism Ambassador. My journey started with just a desire to make people smile. Now, I want to use my platform to share my passion for the world, to promote responsible travel, and to build a global community that cares about our planet and the people in it. ”

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WTM AFRICA 2026



From 13–15 April, dive into the tourism industry's hub for essential discussions and interactive workshops. WTM Africa is all about connecting leaders, inspiring innovation, and shaping the future of travel and tourism. Enjoy highlights like the Women in MICE Awards Breakfast, women's empowerment workshops, NextGen Ready networking and more.

Exhibitors and Buyers enjoy pre-scheduled appointments to maximize experience and secure vital business deals. This is the place to be for key industry insights, networking and growth opportunities.

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Tourism Calendar of Events

February 23-25 2026	Meeting Africa Venue: Sandton Convention Centre Contact: About: 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. It is the most formidable platform on the continent.
March 3-5 2026	ITB Berlin Venue: Messe Berlin, Germany Contact: +44 (0) 1273 227311 About: 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 MesseBerlin to drive innovation and collaboration in global travel and hospitality.
March 18-21 2026	Cameroon International Tourism Fair 2026 Venue: Limbe Botanic Gardens, Cameroon Contact: +237 678553913 Email: floratravelcompanyltd@yahoo.com
Mar - Apr 31-1 2026	Future Hospitality Summit Formerly (AHIF) Venue: Radisson Hotel, Nairobi Kenya Contact: mala.patel@thebench.com About: The Future Hospitality Summit formerly (AHIF) 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 10-12 2026	ILTM Africa Venue: Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa Contact: +27825588214 Email: About: ILTM Africa gives leaders in the African luxury travel market every opportunity to re-connect, build relationships and grow their business. An invitation-only event, the very best travel agents from across the globe meet Africa's most spectacular luxury travel experience providers.
April 13-15 2026	WTM Africa Venue: Cape Town International Convention Centre, South Africa Contact: +27825588214 About: 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	Arabian Travel Market Venue: Dubai, UAE Contact: +44 (0)20 8271 2158 About: 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.

Tourism Calendar of Events

May 19-21 2026	IMEX Frankfurt Venue: Messe Frankfurt, Germany Contact: +44 (0) 1273 227311 About: IMEX Frankfurt is where the global meetings, events and incentive travel industry comes together annually for the largest trade show of its kind in Europe.
May 11-14 2026	Africa's Travel Indaba Venue: Durban, South Africa Contact: About: Africa's Travel Indaba provides a platform for African tourism product owners to meet with global buyers
May 16 2026	Seychelles Nature Trail Venue: Mahe, Seychelles Contact: 0692 655 541 About: 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.
May 21-23 2026	Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo 2026 Venue: Kampala, Uganda Contact: About: Uganda's flagship tourism and Business to Business (B2B) marketing event.
June 4-7 2026	Karibu KiliFair 2026 Venue: Arusha, Tanzania Contact: +255 (0)767 668 245 About: 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	10th AviaDev Africa Venue: Gaborone, Botswana Contact: Email: mala.patel@thebench.com About: 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.
July 5-11 2026	The Seychelles Challenge Venue: Mahe, Seychelles Contact: About: The Seychelles Challenge is a 7-day, 6-night active holiday, featuring daily sailing challenges around the breathtaking Seychelles Islands. The event showcases the Seychelles as a premier sailing destination, and promises an unforgettable blend of competition, camaraderie, and natural beauty.

Travel & Tourism Blitz



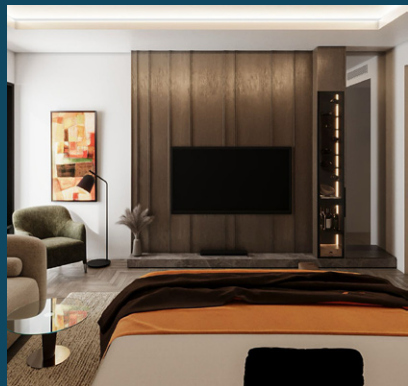
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Travel & Tourism Blitz

Accor Expands West Africa Footprint with landmark signing of Mövenpick and Mövenpick Living Abuja



Accor, a world-leading hospitality group, has announced strategic agreement with John Williams Hotels & Resorts and Boulevard Hotel Group to launch Mövenpick and Mövenpick Living in Abuja, Nigeria.

Set to open in Q1 2026, the development will rise in Abuja's Central Business District, offering a warm and welcoming destination that blends contemporary design, generous hospitality, and joyful moments of reconnection. Mövenpick & Mövenpick Living Abuja will feature 138 hotel rooms and 36 serviced apartments, designed to accommodate both short-term stays and the growing demand from multinationals and expatriates seeking high-quality long-term accommodation.

Rooted in Mövenpick's Swiss heritage and vibrant spirit, the property will offer four dining venues, a 665-square metre grand ballroom, flexible meeting and conference spaces, a spa, fitness centre, and an outdoor pool combining business functionality with leisure appeal.

Strategically located on Constitution Avenue, the hotel will offer direct access to the Three Arms Zone and is just 30 minutes from Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, positioning it as a key hub for business travel, MICE events, and diplomatic engagements in West Africa.

It's important for Africa to take its rightful place on the global MICE Stage- SAACI CEO



Glenton De Kock, Chief Executive Officer of the Southern African Association of the Conference Industry (SAACI), has praised Africa's growing visibility and confidence at IBTM World 2025 in Barcelona, noting that the continent is increasingly demonstrating its strength as a world-class meetings and events destination.

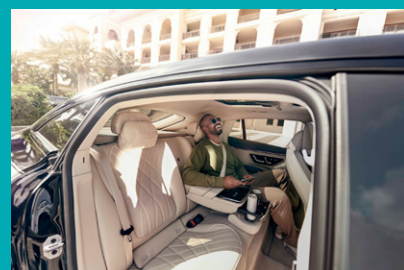
Speaking to VoyagesAfric at the trade show, De Kock said he was delighted to witness how African destinations are presenting themselves with unity and competitive energy on the show floor.

"Africa's got a strong presence," he noted. "I think the ability for Africa to sell in two ways. One, the human side of what we do with our world-class venues, and coupled with that, our skilled professionals in the manner in which we deliver the events."

He stressed that the continent's success in the MICE market lies in the unique blend of high-standard infrastructure and authentic cultural experiences – a combination that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

"The core for Africa is the ability to match our wildlife experiences with our community experiences," he explained. "And coupled with that, as I said earlier, world-class venues – venues that make memories for delegates."

Blacklane expands chauffeur services to Tunis and Nairobi



Blacklane the global chauffeur service, has launched operations in Tunis and Nairobi, scaling its world-class premium mobility to two of Africa's most dynamic cities.

The expansion marks a key step in Blacklane's continued international growth, connecting travelers in both North and East Africa with seamless, reliable mobility and first-class guest service.

René van Olst, CEO EMEA & APAC, Blacklane commented:

"2025 has been a record-breaking year of growth for Blacklane. Far more than adding dots to the map, we partner with local professional chauffeurs to connect them to international travelers booking via a trusted global brand. Our expansion into Tunis and Nairobi is just the start of our roll-out across this rapidly evolving continent."

In Tunis, Blacklane introduces First, Business and Van options, including longer city-to-city journeys. The expansion reflects Tunis's growing role as a regional hub for both business and leisure travel, offering Blacklane's trusted global service standards for conferences, events, meetings and holidays.

Nairobi is Blacklane's first entry into East Africa, offering its Business and Van classes with a focus on airport transfers and chauffeurs by-the-hour, designed to meet the needs of the city's thriving corporate, diplomatic, and tourism sectors.

SA: Tourism Department opens smart visitor centre at OR Tambo Airport



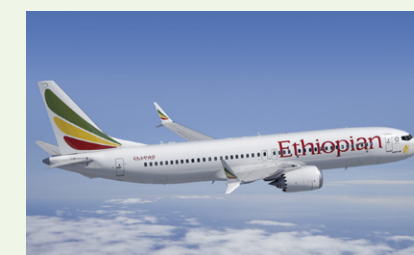
South Africa's Tourism Minister Patricia de Lille ahead of last year's G20 summit launched a Smart Tourism Visitor Information Centre (VIC) at the OR Tambo International Airport, marking a significant milestone in the tourism sector's effort towards digital transformation, innovation, and inclusive development. The Smart Tourism VIC is an interactive, paperless destination marketing centre that offers real-time information on the diverse tourism, culture, and heritage offerings that span across all nine South African

provinces. Situated at the international arrivals' precinct of the OR Tambo International Airport, travellers who arrive in South Africa will immediately be greeted by the enthralling displays of South Africa's culture and nature offerings on the Smart Tourism VIC's screens, and a reminder to explore our beautiful country responsibly. The centre's inclusive design encourages physical accessibility for all visitors, including those with special access needs.

Ethiopian Airlines Commits to Order 11 Boeing 737 MAX Airplanes

Ethiopian Airlines and Boeing announced today Africa's largest carrier has committed to purchase 11 additional 737 MAX jets. The agreement for 11 B737-8, signed at the Dubai Airshow, will enable Ethiopian Airlines to grow its regional and international networks and expand its Addis Ababa hub.

"We are thrilled to be announcing our agreement with Boeing for additional 11 B737-8 airplanes today during Dubai Airshow," said Ethiopian Airlines Group



CEO Mr. Mesfin Tasew. "The order will support our growth plans that we have set as part of our vision and strategy. We are happy that our partnership with

Royal Air Maroc adds flights to LAX in time for the World Cup



Royal Air Maroc plans to launch service from Mohammed V International Airport (CMN) in Casablanca, Morocco, to Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) starting in June. It will be LAX's only nonstop passenger service to Africa.

The flight will operate three times per week – Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays – starting June 7. LAX-bound flights depart CMN at 4 a.m. and arrive at 8:20 a.m., while eastbound service departs LAX at 10:20 a.m. and arrives the next day at 5:25 a.m. (all times local). The airline plans to use a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner for the route, which features 274 seats including 18 in business class. Royal Air Maroc, a Oneworld alliance member, will add Los Angeles as its fourth U.S. destination, alongside New York City's John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK), Miami International Airport (MIA) and Dulles International Airport (IAD) near Washington, D.C.

Boeing continues to grow over the years and we look forward to flying Boeing airplanes for years to come and that we will continue to serve our customers by bringing them high performance airplanes with passenger comfort."

The carrier leverages the reliability, efficiency, and range of its 737 MAX fleet on routes across Africa, the Middle East, India, and Southern Europe, where quick turnarounds and frequency are essential to meet passenger demand.

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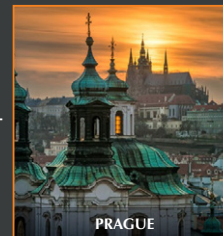
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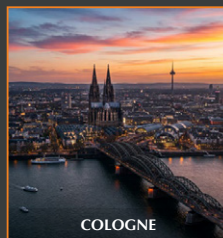
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Updated June 2025

Subject to change