

Greater collaboration among African countries needed to advance tourism on the continent - minister

Africa's Travel Indaba, which is currently taking place at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre, Durban officially opened this year's event with a call for the continent to work collaboratively to drive tourism growth, so as to accelerate the sector's recovery.



Source: Supplied

Over 634 and 625 buyers took their place at the continent's premier travel trade show, as it opened its doors after a three-year hiatus.

Minister of Tourism Lindiwe Sisulu officially opened the trade floor, effectively putting into motion 22,000 scheduled meetings between exhibitors and buyers. "Africa's Travel Indaba is a springboard for the continent to achieve even greater levels of recovery. We are here because we have a collective responsibility to reignite the African continent's tourism growth and economy."

Sisulu called for greater collaboration among African countries to advance tourism on the continent, particularly when it comes to domestic and regional travel. "As we do business, we must remember that our continent is also our own market. All countries in Africa have potential for domestic tourism growth. Intra-continental tourism from Africa's rapidly growing economies and growing middle class is an opportunity begging to be explored. We need improved collaborative efforts between our countries to achieve this."

Sisulu said all role players in the industry must continue to drive growth in tourism numbers by bringing together a range of Africa's best and most unique stories and products from across the continent, and connecting them with buyers from across the world.

She added that the event is about reigniting the spark in old relationships and building new, meaningful connections. "As a sector, we are here to cement our partnerships and collaborations. It can only be to our benefit that we are a sector committed to sharing ideas and knowledge, in a bid to ensure that we advance our Tourism Sector Recovery Plan."

International arrivals increasing

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, the continent welcomed some 18.5-million foreign travellers in 2021, up from 16.2 million in 2020. Of that figure, 6.1-million made their way to North Africa and 12.3-million went to sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, the UNWTO showed that January 2022 experienced a 51% improvement in international tourist arrivals compared to January 2021.

But according to Sisulu, Africa continues to struggle with numerous barriers to tourism growth, which include poor road infrastructure between major cities, limited airlift and stringent immigration regulations.

"I have had several engagements with my fellow cabinet members in related departments, in a bid to partner and address these challenges as we together work towards our sector's recovery. We have already seen positive developments around the roll-out of the e-visa regime for some of our key source markets. This is not only important for South Africa's tourism sector recovery, but also for the greater continent's intra-trade activities," she said.

A UNWTO report on 25 March this year mentioned that international tourism is expected to continue its gradual recovery in 2022. By the end of March, 12 destinations had no Covid-19 related restrictions in place and an increasing number of destinations were easing or lifting travel restrictions, which contributes to unleashing pent-up demand.

Owning our narrative

According to South African Tourism's acting CEO, Themba Khumalo, the event theme Africa's stories, your success, asks all Africans to own the continent's narrative by telling our stories to the world. "There is one very simple way to grab opportunities: by telling our unique stories. Every single African is a storyteller. From the griots of West Africa to South Africa's very own Grammy Award-winning DJ, Black Coffee, the world is waiting in awe to gobble up our stories, arts and numerous cultures."

He added that when Africans tell their own stories, they embark on the journey of changing the continent's narrative. "We shift perceptions from a continent that needs saving, to a continent that is thriving. We no longer look to the world for affirmation or inspiration; the world looks to us. Each one of us would need to be storytellers."