

African ministers unite to develop continent's tourism

PRETORIA: Growth and development of tourism in the African continent is at the top of the agenda during the African Tourism Ministers roundtable discussion on the eve of the official opening of the Tourism Indaba in Durban on Friday...



Image credit: <http://www.tourism.gov.za/>

The roundtable discussion hosted by South African Tourism Minister, Derek Hanekom with the theme *Africa: Open for Tourism Business*, afforded thirteen African Ministers and key tourism industry players an opportunity to discuss and debate the current state of Tourism in Africa with a view of collectively formulating solutions to grow and develop tourism on the continent.

The Tourism Indaba, which remains the largest tourism marketing event for Africa, opened on Friday and will end on Monday.

Minister Hanekom said the African market was undergoing unprecedented growth in tourist arrivals, adding that global interest in the continent, and a growing middle class with disposal income, is driving economic growth.

"Today's meeting was not only a testimony of our commitment to strengthening relationships with our African counterparts, but a positive step forward towards finding workable solutions to advance tourism within the continent. "Although the continent is overwhelmed by social and economic challenges, challenges such as the outbreak of Ebola and the recent attacks on foreign nationals have the potential to impact negatively on tourism on the continent.

Tourism has to rise against challenges

"We have to rise against these challenges, and commit to work together to address them for the future of tourism," he said.

The African region has many assets for tourism development, but challenges to infrastructure development, visa facilitation and connectivity, and the financing of tourism development have the potential to offset that growth.

Speaking on the state of tourism in the African continent, Elcia Grandcourt, Regional Director for Africa at the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) reasserted the UNWTO's commitment to supporting Africa in growing tourism.

"Africa must work with Africa to advance tourism in the continent. Cultural and historical resources in Africa are not being adequately harnessed to lure tourists to Africa. To show our commitment, we will host our first image and branding conference in Accra - Ghana with the view to impart skills within the continent, so it can better profile itself.

"Africa is fast establishing itself as one of the most promising regions for tourism. Africa will receive 85 million international tourist arrivals by 2020, and 134 million in 2030, representing respectively 6,3% and 7,4% of international tourist arrivals worldwide," she said.

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