

It is time to reimagine and reawaken Africa's tourism industry of the future

SOUTH AFRICA, Johannesburg - Tuesday, 31 August 2021: The last time there was a travel trade show on African soil - Meetings Africa 2020 - there was talk of the tourism sector being the economy's last great hope as it boosted GDPs and created jobs with the trajectory of an Airbus A380.

Fast-forward 19 months, and Africa's tourism sector is reflecting, reimagining a different future and reigniting itself after it was upended by the world-engulfing Coronavirus. And there seems to be no better place to start than with a fresh event - Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit (ATTS).

The ATTS Media Launch, held on 31st August 2021 at the Maslow Hotel in Sandton, gave tourism and media stakeholders a chance to learn more about the Summit as a platform whereby travel trade across the continent would come together to share ideas on how to revive the industry. With just 50 attendees allowed at the launch, most of the event's audience were virtual, accessing the event live online.

With the Summit's theme being Reawakening Africa, the event's message is urges tourism stakeholders to reflect, reimagine and reignite tourism on the continent. The ideas and solutions that will be discussed will help boost the industry's resilience in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and abet it in adapting to new business norms.

Deputy Minister encouraged by African Union's proactive approach

Online technology played a part again when Deputy Minister of Tourism, Amos Fish Mahlalela, addressed the audience from a remote location. Mahlalela said the African Union (AU) is also playing its part in trying to support the recovery of the sector. In April 2020, the AU drew up The Continental Tourism Recovery Strategy and called on the African Union Commission, Regional Economic Communities, the African Civil Aviation Commission, the African Development Bank, UNWTO, WTTC, and international development partners, to provide technical expertise, resources and support for the Continental Tourism Recovery Strategy.

Mahlalela also spoke of the Coronavirus' impact on the Southern African Development Community's member states, saying that it could cost the region up to 4.5-million jobs and up to US\$40-billion in GDP.

"The Costed Action Plan for the SADC Tourism Programme has found that countries that significantly rely on tourism and services sectors will experience a downturn in their GDP due to Covid-19 and the resultant restrictions on travel. Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises will be most vulnerable to the impact," he said.

Mahlalela said that the pandemic has given the tourism sector the opportunity to re-invent itself, to reflect and reimagine its role in the world. "Where there is adversity, there is opportunity. One of the ways it can adapt is by leveraging off of digitisation. Africa has the youngest population, most of whom are digital natives. We can leverage off of youth digital culture and knowledge so as to access new business opportunities within tourism."

Mahlalela added that most developed nations have adjusted their travel restrictions and suggestions so as to protect their people against Covid-19. "The UK has developed a traffic light system that indicates which countries are safe for travel. It is alarming to see that most African countries have been placed on the UK's red list for travel destinations. This is partly because of the slow rollout of Covid-19 vaccines across the continent and negative reports in the media."

This, he said, is despite the number of combined Covid-19 cases in Africa being fewer than the US, India and Brazil. Africa as a whole has reached 7.7-million cases as of this Sunday afternoon according the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

Governments supporting tourism revival

According to South African Tourism Acting CEO, Sthembiso Dlamini, the tourism sector still has the potential to create jobs and its importance to the economy has not relinquished. "Governments are committed to supporting the tourism industry's revival. In South Africa, this is evident in its Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, where tourism is listed as one of eight interventions for rebooting the economy."

She added that the Department of Tourism has developed the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan, which looks to preserve the industry's R189-billion and save as many as 125,000 jobs.

Pre-Covid-19 statistics show that Africa's tourism industry was robust. The World Travel & Tourism Council reported that tourism generated in excess of US\$200-billion - accounting for 6.9% of Africa's GDP - and had supported 24.7-million jobs.

In 2020, after the Covid-19 outbreak, statistics show a marked decrease of US\$83-billion and a loss of 7.2-million jobs. This downturn trend was experienced by all tourism sectors across the globe.

Dlamini lauded the AU's efforts to secure more vaccines for the continent. In July this year, it had launched the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) Consortium for COVID-19 which aims to bring together global vaccine developers, funders, and African organisations that conduct clinical trials. "It is also championing the use of a Pan-African bio-surveillance technology called PanaBIOS that can track the spread of the Coronavirus and connect testing centres across the continent," she said.

Hybrid event a sign of things to come

Speaking about the future of the meetings, incentives, conventions and events industry, the Chief Conventions Bureau Officer of the South African National Conventions Bureau, Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo, said that business events on the continent would need to adapt to what will be a hybridised environment.

The Summit is the first event on the continent to be hosted physically and virtually. "The Summit also welcomes global community delegates who are curious to understand how tourism has shifted on the African continent in order to reengineer their packages to their clients based on what is on offer while preparing to do business in the future."

Kotze-Nhlapo added that the Summit exists to address the perception that travelling and doing business in Africa is not safe due to Covid-19. "This was driven mainly by the heightened global media focus on the continent. On the contrary, Africa is ready and open to do business. With our vaccine roll outs underway in many different countries on the continent - we are proactively regaining our credibility."

About Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit

Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit will take place from 19th to 21st September 2021. It will be the African travel trade's first hybrid conference, whereby tourism stakeholders can access events

physically and online. And in an unprecedented move by South African Tourism, the Summit will be held in five venues across Africa, including Johannesburg and Durban.

The event opens with a SMME Workshop that will focus on best practices, collaboration for transformation, changing perceptions of small businesses.

The event's focus will then focus on the industry's macro-level issues such as how tourism can build a resilient post-Covid-19 business events Industry, how it can create a growth path for the recovery of airlines and how the hospitality industry navigates the regulatory environment in creating sustainable investment opportunities in Africa.

Register for Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit at www.africatourismsummit.com.

For media enquiries, please contact:

Lesego Marimo at South African Tourism

Tel: +27 11 73 266 6025

Email: lesegom@southafrica.net OR mediaq@southafrica.net

Website www.southafrica.net

Note to editors:

About South African Tourism

South African Tourism is the national tourism agency responsible for the marketing of South Africa as a preferred tourist destination. It is headed up by Acting Chief Executive Officer Ms Sthembiso Dlamini.