



Private Bag X424, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa. Tel. (+27 12) 444 6780, Fax (+27 12) 444 7027
Private Bag X9154, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa. Tel. (+27 21) 469 5800, Fax: (+27 21) 465 3216

MEDIA STATEMENT

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South Africa's Tourism Rebound Gains Momentum

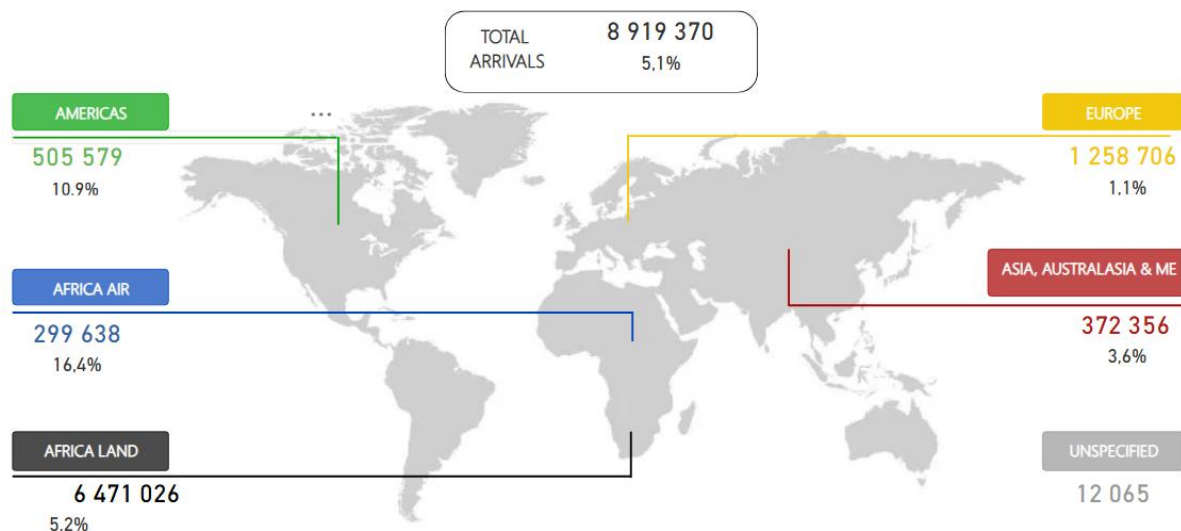
Steady Growth Signals Recovery

The latest international arrivals data from Statistics South Africa confirms that South Africa's tourism sector continues to grow, with total arrivals reaching 8.92 million in 2024, marking an impressive 5.1% increase compared to 2023.

Africa continues to drive the majority of arrivals, contributing 76% of all tourists from January to December 2024, while growth from other regions signals steady recovery.

Although the sector has yet to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels (2019), it now contributes 8.8% to GDP and supports 1.68 million jobs, according to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates. This positive momentum underscores the resilience of the sector, despite global economic pressures.

"It is encouraging to see that despite economic uncertainties in various parts of the world, the global tourism sector is growing. It is even more encouraging that our country follows the same trend and trajectory," Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille said.



Source: StatsSA
Africa Leads the Way

The African continent remains South Africa's largest source of tourists, with 6.8 million tourist arrivals in 2024, making up 76% of total arrivals.

- Zimbabwe remains the top source market, growing by 3.6% compared to 2023 to 2,183,260 arrivals in 2024.
- Ghana recorded an exceptional 149.0% increase from 2023, reaching 36,656 arrivals in 2024, largely driven by availability of airlift and the introduction of a visa waiver in November 2023.

Minister de Lille expressed appreciation for the continued growth from the African continent, particularly Ghana.

"Ghana's immense performance can be attributed to the fact that travellers between Ghana and South Africa no longer need visas to travel between the two countries. This, coupled with increased airlift targeted marketing initiatives by South African Tourism, makes for a winning formula for the growth of our sector," Minister de Lille said.

The visa-free travel agreement between South Africa and Ghana, implemented in November 2023, has played a pivotal role in attracting tourists, allowing travel for up to 90 days without a visa for business or tourism purposes.

Strengthening Growth in the Americas

Tourist arrivals from the Americas saw a strong 10.9% growth from 2023, reaching 505,579 arrivals in 2024.

- The United States remains the top market in the region and is the top overseas market, with 372,362 tourists, reflecting a 5.2% increase from 2023 to 2024.
- The increase in direct air connectivity from Brazil, combined with improved marketing efforts, has contributed significantly to a 94.2% rise in arrivals from Brazil from 2023 to 2024, totalling 49,855 tourists for 2024.

This consistent growth highlights South Africa's appeal among long-haul travellers and the effectiveness of strategic partnerships with airlines and trade.

European Markets Show Positive Momentum

Tourist arrivals from Europe reached 1,258,706 in 2024, reflecting a 1.1% increase compared to 2023.

- The United Kingdom remains the top European source market, with 349,883 arrivals in 2024, though this was 1.8% lower than 2023.
- Germany experienced strong growth of 4.0%, with 254,992 arrivals in 2024.
- The Netherlands is performing better than France and saw a 0.8% increase, totalling 132,422 arrivals in 2024.

While Europe's growth is slower compared to other regions, the region is a bedrock with regard to having the most overseas arrivals and has emerged as a strong-performing market, largely due to focused marketing campaigns showcasing South Africa's culture, people and attractions.

Asia & Australasia: Noteworthy Growth

Tourist arrivals from Asia surged by 4.2%, with 207,718 tourists recorded in 2024.

- China saw an 11.4% increase, totalling 41,651 arrivals, driven by targeted promotions and increasing flight connectivity.
- India recorded 75,541 arrivals, a 5.3% decline, primarily due to visa processing backlogs and the absence of direct flights.
- South Africa saw a phenomenal 31.8% growth from Japan reaching 17,370 arrivals in 2024
- Australia also posted steady gains, with strong travel demand from the region expected to fuel further growth in 2025.

Middle East Performance: Mixed Results

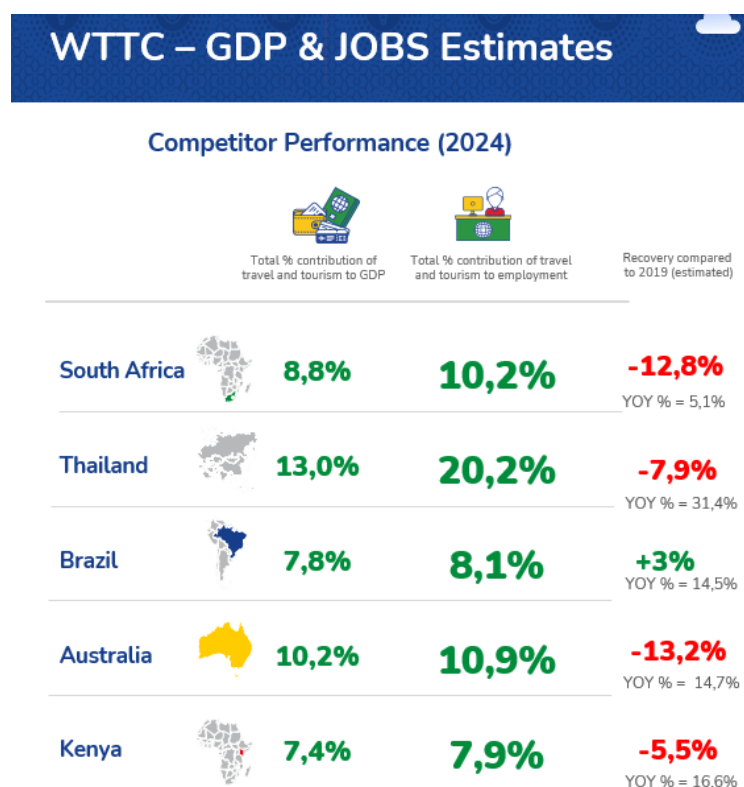
The Middle East saw a decline of 16.1%, with total arrivals dropping to 45,602. However, Saudi Arabia changed the trend, increasing arrivals by 12.1% to 18,333 arrivals to South Africa in 2024.

The United Arab Emirates contributed 6,717 arrivals to South Africa in 2024.

While the overall performance in this region faced setbacks, strategic efforts to increase connectivity and enhance trade engagement in other markets in the region will be crucial to future recovery.

Competitive Landscape: South Africa vs. Global Players

Among key direct competitors, South Africa ranks third in tourism's contribution to GDP:



Source: WTTC estimates for competitor stats for GDP and Employment information

South Africa's year-on-year growth of 5.1% shows steady progress, but more consistent investment in air connectivity and global marketing is needed to remain competitive.

The Future of Tourism: Strategies for Growth

To accelerate recovery, South Africa has implemented strategic marketing and policy interventions:

- **Expanding Airlift:** Efforts are underway to restore key routes, increase airline partnerships, and improve direct access to a variety of cities in South Africa and access to the globe. A key development is that on 4 December 2024, Cabinet approved the Route Development Marketing Strategy to be implemented by the Department of Tourism, SA Tourism and the private sector.
- **Targeted Market Campaigns:** Promoting unique South African experiences in key markets such as China, India, and the Americas.
- **Boosting Digital & AI-Powered Travel Planning:** Enhancing traveller experiences with personalized digital platforms.
- **Growing Sustainable & Cultural Tourism:** Capitalizing on eco-tourism, cultural and heritage-based experiences.
- **Enhancing Safety & Security Measures:** Working with law enforcement and industry partners to enhance traveller confidence while ensuring the safety of local communities.

"The tourism sector is a strong contributor to the economy and job creation. We are determined to continue with this momentum and push the numbers much higher so that we can grow our contribution to economic growth and job creation even further. South Africa remains attractive and accessible for all travellers to enjoy and we thank all international and domestic travellers for exploring our beautiful country and contributing to the tourism sector's performance," Minister de Lille concluded.

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For further information contact:

Zara Nicholson
Ministry Media Liaison Officer
Cell: +27 (0) 79 416 5996
Email: znicholson@tourism.gov.za

OR

Thandiwe Mathibela at South African Tourism
GM: Global PR, Communications and Stakeholder Relations
Tel: +27 825 520979 Email: mediaq@southafrica.net
Website www.southafrica.net