

Africa: Tremendous Potential For The Development Of Tourism

By: Karen Dabrowska



Mr Hector Makome on the South African stand (Pic WTM)

Africa, the only region in the world to report an increase in tourist arrivals in the first four months of this year, was very well represented at this year's World Travel Market (WTM) with stands from 37 countries: Angola, Ascension Islands, Benin, Burkino Fasco, Burundi, Cape Verde, Congo (Democratic Republic), Burundi, Cape Verde, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, St Helena, Togo, Zambia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Namibia, Reunion, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

WTM is a premier global four-day event for the travel industry where around 50,000 senior travel industry professionals, government ministers and international press, embark on London's ExCeL Centre in the Docklands every November to network, negotiate and discover the latest industry opinion and trends.

During a press conference focusing on the effects of the recession on the tourist industry, the President of the World Travel And Tourism Council, Jean -

Claude Baumgarten described Africa as 'a fantastic continent' where tourism can provide tremendous job opportunities.

He pointed out that Africa is one of the destinations which suffered least from the recession. "We need to have peace in some countries and a favourable environment for investment. The task is enormous but the potential is bigger. In the next ten years we see tourism in Africa growing faster than in the rest of the world."

Middle Eastern stands at WTM





Dubai's stand (Pic WTM)

The World Travel Market Global Trends Report predicts 42 million international tourists will visit Africa by the end of 2010. Launched at this year's ITM the report said that despite the global economic recession inbound arrivals to Africa increased more than 3% in 2008. The combination of increased government investment and, improved quality of travel services, has helped fuel the surge.

According to the report tourism to Africa is experiencing a revival largely thanks to US President Barack Obama. World Travel

Market Chairman Fiona Jeffery said: "The Obama effect will prove a huge boost to the prosperity of local communities and the region as a whole . This is a trend that is likely to continue, and even spread internationally, as more and more people take an interest in their ancestral origins and seek to find their roots."

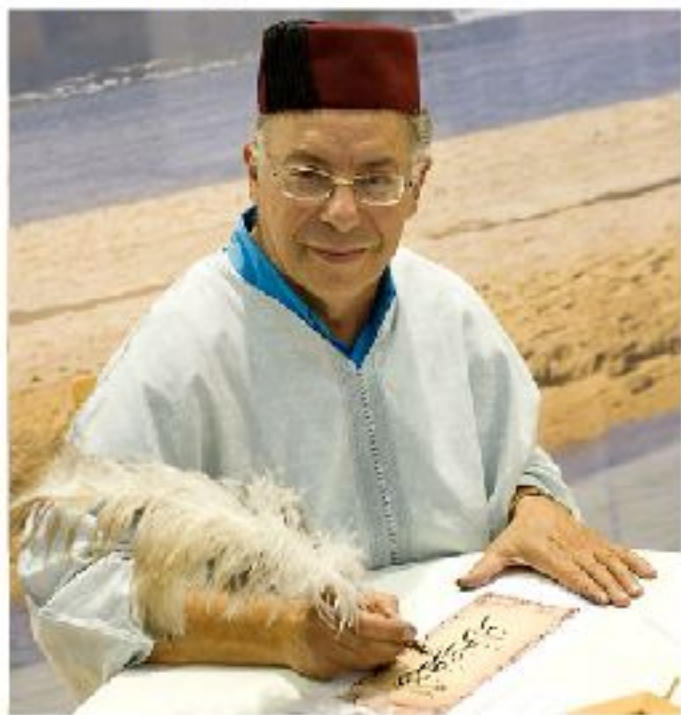
Many agencies are now offering Obama packages such as the President Obama Africa Roots Tour by Africa Travel Waves (Kenya) where visitors visit his ancestral home and learn about the Luo people.

The US represents Africa's largest source market with 41 million African-Americans in residence. Of the total, 31% make up Generation Y (people born in the 80s and early 90s) presenting a strong opportunity for tourism to the region to continue to grow in the long-term.

Furthermore, DNA testing to trace ancestral origin has increased in popularity and is boosting cultural and heritage tourism to the region. There are

now more than 2,000 genealogy companies in the US and 35,000 African Americans have done DNA tests since 2002.

The report concludes that the region already offers a diversity of culture and hospitality and political stability is increasing the attractiveness of its destinations. The internet is also fuelling the revival with positive traveller reviews opening up various destinations for independent travel and package holiday itineraries appealing to the more mainstream market.



Artist on the Moroccan stand (Pic WTM)



Africa section at WTM

Africa is hosting major tourism events such as the Fifth International Africa Diaspora Heritage Trail Conference held in Tanzania in October this year. In September, Ghana was the first African country to host the United Nations World Tourism Day with the central theme 'tourism celebrating diversity'. Now all eyes are on South Africa which is hosting the FIFA World Cup Football Tournament next summer.

African exhibitors at this year's WTM were very optimistic about the continent's prospects for the development of tourism, especially in countries where oil revenues are prompting the development of infrastructure and the promotion of tourist facilities. During the past five years there has been a growth in eco tourism and visitor involvement in the development of communities they visit. One American university is taking its

students to Mali for two to three weeks to work with local communities and/or NGO's. Corruption and inefficient bureaucracies which delay the issuing of visas are two major problems. But with the growth in the numbers of visitors the Africans are catering to a variety of tastes and vegetarian food and halal food is now available. Nick Redmayne of Travel Media pointed out that with the notable exceptions of those who visit Tanzania and Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda and South Africa and Botswana and those who go

on overland expeditions visitors from the UK were still travelling to only one destination in Africa. "Pan African travel is hindered by hefty visa charges and a Byzantine bureaucracy. But the new Libyan airline Afriqiah seems to be very active and positive about developing intra-African networks. Bradt Travel Guides recently published North Africa: The Roman Coast dedicated to the Roman heritage sites of modern-day Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, which encourages travelers to visit more than one country".





Hajara Mohammed of the Nigeria Tourism Development Board is very eager to promote intra-African tourism. "We want to regenerate the spirit of oneness among the African nations", she said. "The future is very bright but it may take some time for countries like Nigeria to catch up with countries like South Africa, Ghana and Kenya in the development of their tourist industries".

In Namibia tourism is the second largest income generator after

Abdulrahman farming. Namibia was the first country in the world to include wildlife protection in its constitution. Seventeen percent of the land surface consists of government wild life parks and another 17 percent of private wild life parks. There is a focus on responsible tourism with lodges using solar and wind power.

Dr Daan Roux of Where to Stay Namibia supports NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) but believes governments are very slow to

lock into it. But there are six transfrontier parks in southern Africa where the borders have been opened so the animals can roam freely. "This proves that silently we are bound together – tourism dictates the politics in certain instances".

Lloyd Murray of Continent Tours in Mali commented that the country was still seen as an exotic destination. "People who have seen the animals in Kenya can't stand still – they will want to see Timbuktu and the Dogan [tribe]. A 140 room, four star hotel is currently being built in Timbuktu. At present the largest hotel only has 30 rooms. He is

not optimistic about intra-African co-operation. "I don't see how a country like Nigeria would help a poor country like Mali to develop its tourist industry", he said.

Andy Lamont of Garden Route & Klein Karoo in Cape Town has noticed an increased demand for spa treatments in South Africa. "People who come for treatment prefer organic products from the earth. They also believe in natural healing". He is an advocate of 'international unified tourism' because different countries have different products. "A tourist would not like to see something twice unless its very spectacular".

