

Africa's travel and tourism top 2018 highlights

 By [Josephine Wawira](#)

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Africa's travel and tourism industry continued to record impressive growth in the past year. The continent hit a 63 million high in international tourist arrivals in 2017, as compared to 58 million in 2016 (+ 9% vs 2016); according to a [Hospitality Report](#) published in December 2018.



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The growth record is slightly above the global performance of a 7% rise in 2017, to reach a total of 1.323 billion international tourist arrivals.

Here are some of the tourism highlights for the just concluded year, 2018.

1. International tourist arrivals

As compared to her counterparts, Africa's share of international tourist arrivals was only 5%. Europe boasted the lion's share with 51%, followed by Asia and the Pacific which recorded 24%. The Americas and the Middle East had 16% and 4% respectively.

Results were driven by the continued recovery in Tunisia and Morocco, and strong performance in Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritius and Zimbabwe. Island destinations Seychelles, Cabo Verde and Reunion recorded double-digit growth in arrivals.

2. Economic contribution

The African economy has been gaining momentum, with the real output growth expected to reach 4.1% by 2018/2019. Travel and tourism contribution to Africa's GDP was expected to reach 12% (a 3.7% rise) in 2018; from a total of 8.1% (USD 177.6 billion) in 2017.

The industry is also a major employer in the continent, expected to support 23 million jobs (3.1% increase) in 2018. The sector supported 22 million jobs in 2017, approximately 6.5% of total employment. These include jobs directly and indirectly supported by the tourism industry.

3. Expenditures

Considered one of the most important economic activities in Africa, travel and tourism generated \$37bn in international visitor expenditure in 2017.

Domestic travel recorded a high of 60% in local spending as compared to 40% in international spending. This was attributed to among other factors affordability and ease of travel within the continent, as people's movement gradually became a basic need for most of the middle class with higher spending power and who create and shape the future generation entrepreneurs.

Other factors also included the mushrooming of low-cost airlines, upward growth of bed capacity in main cities, and flourishing of the shared economy. This is not to mention the creation of visa upon arrival, e-visa and visa-free travel for African citizens; as well as the use of the AU e-Passport. Africans now do not require a visa to travel to 25% of other African countries and can get visas on arrival in 24% of other African countries. However, there remains a dominant 51% of African countries which need Africans to have visas to travel.

Moreover, 70% of tourism expenditure was recorded from leisure tourists, as leisure travel remained dominant in 2018. Business expenditure, on the other hand, recorded the other 30%.

4. Rise of international hotel brands

In 2018, there was a reported pipeline activity of 76,322 rooms in 418 hotels (with over 100 brands across Africa). Of these, 47,679 rooms in 298 hotels were in Sub Saharan Africa, while North Africa recorded 28,643 rooms in 120 hotels.

A sub-Saharan African breakdown placed West Africa at the top of pipeline activity at 48%, followed by East Africa at 29%, South Africa at 19% and Central Africa at 4% respectively.

5. Africa's air passenger traffic

There exist enormous opportunities for the continent's airlines to grow, with Africa having recorded only 2.2% of the world's total air passenger traffic.

With growing economies, a burgeoning middle class and a youthful population, [IATA forecasts](#) Africa to be the fastest growing air transport passenger market at 4.9% per year to 2037. With this growth, passenger traffic will increase by an additional 197 million over the next 20 years, bringing total passenger traffic to 321 million by 2037.

According to IATA's Special Envoy to Africa on Aero political Affairs, Raphael Kuuchi, the sustainable growth of African airlines traffic lies in removing the bottlenecks; to effective connectivity, lowering industry operating cost and developing commercial cooperation among airlines.

ABOUT JOSEPHINE WAWIRA

Josephine Wawira is a consultant in communication and public relations with over six years of progressive writing and broadcast experience. She is currently a writer for Africa's online hotel booking portal, Jumia Travel, focusing in the areas of travel, tourism, and hospitality as it relates to Africa.

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