

Poor flight connectivity, strict visa rules make tourists avoid Africa

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No African city made it to the Top 100 City Destinations ranking released a week ago by research firm Euromonitor International. This is because interconnectivity among African cities is poor, as there are few direct flights between countries by the continent's airlines.



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For instance, a traveller from East Africa to the North African city of Algiers has at least four African airlines to choose from, but they all have at least one connection with a two-hour layover. Such travel challenges, coupled with visa restrictions, continue to keep away tourists who would want to tour different parts of the continent on one visit.

It's important for African countries to simplify cross-border travel

In contrast with the United States and Europe, where there is more interconnectivity between cities, Africans need visas to travel to other African states.

African Development Bank's 2017 Africa Visa Openness Report shows that there are just 11 countries that have relaxed visa rules for Africans. These are the Seychelles, Uganda, Djibouti, Somalia, Madagascar, Comoros, Togo, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Mozambique and Benin.

In many cases, it is easier for a citizen of another continent to enter an African country than it is for an African. But some countries like Ghana give visas on arrival for all African Union member states and visa-free entry for members of Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas).

Travel agents and tourist service providers say it is important for African countries to simplify cross-border travel by easing and, in some cases, abolishing visa restrictions.

"In West Africa, we have been lobbying governments to have an Ecowas tourist visa that will give access to all countries in the bloc. Whether it will be implemented is another story, but the principle of open borders is great," said tour services operator, David Oades of Overlanding West Africa.

Top 10

According to Euromonitor International, the top 10 cities in the world that people want to visit are Hong Kong which receives 26.6 million people a year, followed by Bangkok (21.2 million), London (19.2 million), Singapore (16.6 million), Macau (15.4 million), Dubai (14.9 million), Paris (14.4 million), New York (12.7 million), Shenzhen (12.6 million) and Kuala Lumpur (12.3 million).

In the Middle East and Africa category, the only African cities featured are Johannesburg and Cairo, at position 2 and 10 respectively. The report ranks Dubai as the top destination in the category.

South Africa considers tourism part of its economic growth strategy. Johannesburg has a smart access programme through which it aims to provide free Wi-Fi access across the city by 2020.

Internet connections are the holy grail for travellers who need it to find maps for navigation, to load taxi-hailing apps like Uber, for weather forecasts, and finding accommodation.

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