

Standards warning as African aviation boom looms

The aviation industry in Africa is on the cusp of an unprecedented and extended boom, which augurs well for growth on the continent, but must also prompt a serious review of standards that can impact on safety and security, an industry expert warns.

"As the world comes to Africa looking to reap the benefits offered by emerging markets, the industry on the continent is already starting to noticeably expand, with new contracts and tenders coming on-stream over the length and breadth of the region," says Forsyth Black, senior vice president for Africa, the Middle East and India of Menzies Aviation, which operates at 136 airports in 29 countries around the world.

"However with this increased traffic comes an increased responsibility to ensure that standards, including those related to support services such as baggage handling, passenger and aircraft services, are not neglected. Failing to ensure that the services keep up could have impacts that range from merely annoying to disastrous for citizens of developing countries and travellers alike," he says.

The future of aviation in Africa

It is believed that Africa will become home to more than 1 200 new airliners in the next two decades as local economies grow, bringing increased trade and investment. The growth is expected to take place across the continent, in northern and southern Africa, as well as East and West.

Recently, Ethiopia was one of the first countries in the world to order Boeing's latest, the 787 Dreamliner. At last count, there were 88 new Boeing wide-body planes on order from African countries.

In the aviation industry alone, 2012 has seen the launch of Fastjet, a new pan-African airline backed by Lonrho and Stelco, the founder of EasyJet. According to Black, there are new airports being built in Senegal, St Helena and Mozambique, and new terminals or refurbishments being completed in Morocco, Mauritius and Mozambique, says Black.

"Some of the countries which will join the global village will be relatively new to the demands posed by rigorous security and safety requirements", Black warns, adding that it will be "essential for local authorities to ensure operators, including new airlines, are familiar with and adhere to minimum standards".

"It is imperative that particularly in developing countries, that each country's Civil Aviation Authority confirm adherence to the very highest safety, security and technical standards to ensure that the continent's air infrastructure and operators are of the best quality," says Black.

"On a continent as vast and in places as inaccessible as ours in Africa, aviation is key to trade and tourism as well as cross-border travel for Africans. Access to a safe, secure and modern aviation infrastructure is an economic imperative for Africa and its citizens."