

African air travel expected to take off

With the announcement of the new pan-African passport that will follow in 2018, African air travel spend is expected to rise with 24%. This new passport will enable African travellers to visit other countries on the continent without a visa.



Dino Gelmetti

The comprehensive survey by Sabre aimed to uncover the opportunities and challenges faced by African travellers today, in a bid to help airlines address these to support their own growth and provide travellers a better journey. Travellers from four countries – South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Egypt were surveyed, with those having flown in the past 24 months saying they would spend 24 percent more with the introduction of the passport (from \$1,100 to \$1,500 annually).

But despite a willingness among travellers to spend more on flights, travel in Africa still remains inaccessible to the majority, with only 23% of those surveyed having travelled abroad at all in the last two years.

Sabre's traveller survey reveals significant growth opportunity for African airlines willing to address traveller current pain points.

When asked what prevents them from travelling more, the top reasons were:

- 32% said travel is too expensive.
- 31% said it is difficult obtaining VISAs.
- 30% said it is too difficult to book travel.
- 28% said there are no flights to their chosen destination.

Travellers also expressed a number of gripes about their current experiences when travelling:

- 27% said the check-in process takes too long.
- 22% said the check-in procedure is confusing.
- 20% don't like the food on aircrafts.
- 19% think there is not enough to do at the airport.

“The results suggest that while travel is inaccessible to many and is difficult for those that do travel, there is still a strong desire to travel more,” said Dino Gelmetti, vice president, Europe, Middle East and Africa, Airline Solutions, Sabre. “Additionally, most of the pain points can be addressed by airlines, and these tweaks could make all the difference to travellers.

“African carriers currently face tough competition from international rivals that control 88% of African airspace but, as demand for travel increases, African airlines have a real opportunity to win the lion’s share of bookings by addressing the pain points of travellers and going the extra mile to improve their experience.”

Like many other travellers globally, Africans also expressed a strong interest in experiencing a travel journey that was more personalised and tailored towards them. Respondents said that they would be willing to spend up to \$104 per trip on an airline’s extra products and services – such as excess baggage, cabin class upgrades, and special food and beverage – if it improved and personalised their journey.

“Airlines globally currently pocket an average of just \$16 per passenger on ancillaries, so the fact that African travellers are prepared to spend six times more than that represents a significant retail opportunity for carriers on the continent,” said Gelmetti. “Airlines will flourish if they invest in technology that can make sense of customer data and use it to offer passengers the right product in the right context at the right time. This technology, which empowers airlines to mirror the personalised shopping tactics already mastered by the online retail industry has been proven to increase ancillary revenue by an average of 10% and is being used by some of the world’s most forward-thinking carriers.”

As further encouragement for African carriers, Sabre’s survey respondents stated a number of reasons why people would choose to fly with their local carrier over a foreign airline; the top three reasons were:

- It offered cheaper tickets.
- It offered the latest technology on board.
- It offered greater comfort on board.

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