

Slow infrastructure advancement hindering tourism and hospitality growth in Africa

By [Bennet Otoo](#) 2 Jun 2017

The destinations with the strongest growth in international arrivals in 2016 were Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Ghana, Sudan, and Seychelles according to the Jumia Travel Hospitality Report for Africa which was launched about a week ago. Figures from that report also indicate that foreign visitor spending stood at 36.3% in 2016 (\$40.7bn), and is expected to grow by 5.3% in 2017 to \$42.9bn, and then by 5.9% p.a. to \$76bn in 2027.

These figures look very encouraging and only points in one direction: continuous growth and development the travel and tourism industry. However, there are a few points directly responsible for the success or otherwise of this industry - notable among these is infrastructure. Jumia Trave highlights a few areas of infrastructure that need improvement and possible ways to find long-term solutions:



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Transport systems

Transportation remains one of the key areas to seriously look at if the tourism and hospitality industries in Africa will develop. In other parts of the world where technology is far advanced and infrastructural development is at its peak, tourism and hospitality booms. Africa is plagued with two important factors when it comes to transportation.

Firstly, the lack of adequate, modern means of transportation. Many countries in Africa have either one international airport with only a few airlines coming in and out. Train stations are scarce, buses are either few or not comfortable enough, and taxi services are also few or too risky. The second fact is that even if these transport services are in place, maintenance and sustainability is a major problem.

How to effectively manage and maintain these aircraft, trains, buses and taxi's for long periods is a major challenge. Tour operators, policy makers, and investors must come together to quickly tackle this problem by investing in the acquisition and proper maintenance of these transport mediums. Effective legislation by policy makers will also help regulate transport systems and improve standards.

Energy supplies

We are at a stage where energy drives everything - from electricity to generators and to a large extent fuel. These constitute a very powerful force in the development of tourism and hospitality. The lack of consistent electric power supply hampers the hospitality business and makes the continent less attractive for tourists and business travellers.

Many of our tourist sites are secluded in far away villages and towns. This means that a very historic tourist site on the outskirts of Bunkpurugu, Ghana will be less attractive to a tourist from North America because of the lack of electricity. Even in the urban areas with no electricity, air conditioners and fans will be off, phone batteries will be low and guests won't feel comfortable. For hotels, restaurants and other facilities that have stand-by generators, high costs of fuel cause a very steep decline in profit margins since more money is spent than normal.

How do we tackle this issue? As citizens, it is important that we conserve energy domestically by using energy saving appliances as well as paying all bills on time. The government and policymakers also have an obligation to ensure the consistent supply of electricity as well as adequate fuel subsidy to make fuel affordable for hospitality and tourism stakeholders and players.

Roads

One very disturbing thing to look at also is the bad and deteriorating state of our roads. Many of the highways in the big cities are in great shape and make for easy movements in those cities. Cities such as Lagos, Nairobi, Accra and Johannesburg have some amazing roads and bridges that link many suburbs and towns. Some of these roads are even accompanied by eye-catching architecture.

However, it is the state of the roads linking our tourist sites, hotels and recreational centres that raise cause for alarm. Many of them were constructed several years ago and are worn out now. Others have never been well constructed. This makes it challenging and frustrating for tourists to travel long distances on these roads to visit these sites. In certain places, you may have to travel a few kilometres by road and walk long distances to get there.

One may argue it forms part of the adventure but for many, this is something that can deter them from making the trip entirely. Already, many governments in Africa are investing in the construction of good quality roads to and from popular tourist sites and hotels. This will make access to these facilities easy and boost the industry.

Modern on-site accommodation

The days of huts, small motels and guest houses are gradually fading away in Africa. These days, ultra modern four to five-star hotels are taking over. Even in remote areas or suburbs, you will find state-of-the-art guest lodges and hostels. This is the way to go. In several countries outside Africa, modern accommodation isn't scarce and they come at very moderate prices. This makes it easy for tourists and guests to travel the continent knowing that they will be comfortable and they can afford to stay a few nights.

Although major hotel chains are investing in Africa and establishing themselves here, there is still a big gap when it comes to modern hotels and accommodation. Even the few that are already in place do not match those from Europe, Asia, and the America. In order to attract foreign spending through tourists, it is very

important that we provide similar comfort as these guests would get if they travel to other parts of the world. This will make Africa competitive with other tourist destinations worldwide. With the warmth and friendliness of Africans, we sure have an advantage.

Recreational facilities

Value added service is another way of driving this industry forward. Offering the same things all the time makes us static. Apart from the tourist sites, accommodation, roads, transport facilities and social amenities there has to be something extra that draws tourists or other travellers to our continent. One great way is the establishment of recreational facilities such as fun parks, beaches, pubs, malls and digital centres.

Of course, all of these make staying in a country comfortable. However, a combination of all other factors ensure that a visitor has an amazing time in Africa. These facilities can be owned and managed by individuals, corporate bodies or investors, This brings extra income as well as helps develop the industry. The richer we make this industry, the better for everyone involved.

The era of bed and breakfasts are far gone and these days, if all you have on offer is a bed and breakfast, then you are likely to go out of business in no time. You have to offer more in other to stay competitive. Recreational centres are just what this industry needs. Some place to relax, have fun and spend some time with colleagues, family or that special person.

Many governments in Africa are making giant strides in the advancement of infrastructure but the pace at which it's going raises a genuine case of concern for many stakeholders and players in the tourism and hospitality industries. There is a collective need to speed up development in this area in order to achieve the massive potential that the industry has.

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