

UN Trade and Devt Agency Chief: Do not ignore African tourists, they are the future

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African governments should give attention to tourists from within the continent to further grow the sector rather than focus most on those from across the oceans, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) secretary-general Mukhisa Kituyi has said. Kituyi was speaking at the 41st Annual World Tourism Conference, which is currently underway in Kigali.



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Kituyi said African countries often fail to appreciate and give attention to tourists from the continent, which is the fastest growing source of visitors. Instead, countries focus on tourists from Europe, America, and Asia, who tend to be seasonal.

Intra-African tourism can sustain industry better than season, international tourism

Kituyi said tourists from the continent visit the country throughout the year as opposed to the 'preferred tourists' who only visit seasonally.

"The fastest growing tourism is intra-African tourism. Movement of tourists from one African country to another. There are very many positive components about Intra-African tourism, one is that it is not seasonal. It is 12 months a year, conference tourism, medical tourism, educational tourism and business visits. This sustains the industry better than the occasional seasonal tourism," he said.

According to statistics from UNCTAD, tourists from the continent make up a total of 44 percent of the total visitors received in the continent and this is expected to grow to 50 percent in coming years.

"Intra-African tourism grew from 34 percent to 44 percent of the total number of tourists in Africa. The projections are that it will be above 50 percent in the next 10 years," Kituyi said.

Spill-over effects

The prioritisation of tourists from outside the continent, he said, has consequently led to issues such as poor service delivery to African tourists and has also influenced the messaging of African tourists' destinations. "There is a traditional attitude that tourists are European, American, and more recently Chinese arrivals and African tourists are considered as distraction. Even in the messaging of attractions, we talk to everyone else other than the growing tourists.

"It is incumbent for Africa to know that they cannot grow their efficiencies as tourist destination unless they start appreciating that those African visitors are the main visitors of the future," he said.

African countries can also boost intra-Africa tourism by advocating and rolling out visa-free regimes and passport-less travel across the continent.

Jose da Silva Gonçalves, the Cape Verde minister for economy and employment, admitted to giving more priority to connect to Western countries as opposed to the rest of the continent. The country is currently well connected to the US and Europe but the minister said that going forward, they will invest in increasing connection to the rest of the continent.

Kituyi faulted African countries for not allocating sufficient budgets and resources to develop the tourism sub-sector and instead preferring traditional sectors such as mining. "Africa receives much more from the tourism sector that it appreciates. We still live in a time where public budgets are going into traditional sectors with limited dynamism and less assured potential of creating sustainable employment and less capacity for the gender gap," Kituyi said.

He said the sub-sector yields about 8 percent of the continent's Gross Domestic Product with tourist receipts standing at over \$47bn while tourism exports fetch over \$50bn.

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