

Tourism the driving force in Africa

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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Despite last year's global and local turmoil, tourism continues to be an economic driving force with the United Nations World Tourism Organisation estimating (based on available data) that international tourist arrivals to Africa grew by 8% in 2017.

The region consolidated its 2016 rebound and reached a record 62 million international arrivals. North Africa enjoyed a strong recovery with arrivals growing by 13%, while in sub-Saharan Africa arrivals increased by 5%.

“*"We often have the approach that overseas is better but we have innovation and talent right on our doorstep that we need to nurture and harvest."* - Nina Freysen-Pretorius [@ICCAfrica](#) [#MeetingsAfrica18](#) [pic.twitter.com/4d95K6KIVq](#)— SANCB (@SA_NCB) [February 28, 2018](#)”

International tourist arrivals grew by a remarkable 7% in 2017 to reach a total of 1,322 million in South Africa – this strong momentum is expected to continue in 2018 at a rate of between four and five percent.

Sisa Ntshona, South African Tourism (SAT) CEO, says this solidifies what we have always known: “We are definitely in the right industry. Africa is a hive of activity when it comes to tourism. We at South African Tourism believe that the stronger the African based associations are, the better positioned they will be to enhance the economy and assist in the generation of economic development and growth of international business events coming to Africa”.

Africa - the growing business destination

Ntshona was speaking at the African Society of African Association Executives (AfSAE), which took place at Meetings Africa, held recently at the Sandton Convention Centre in Sandton, Gauteng.

"At Meetings Africa, the aim is to market Africa as an ideal business destination and showcase the continent's readiness and capability to host world-class business events. A key objective of this event is to encourage and stimulate the rotation of meetings on the African continent.

"It is the one trade show that integrates African continent business events under a single strategic positioning of “Advancing Africa Together”. We are here together to share insights and knowledge and best practices. This will certainly strengthen our quest to attract more business events, and thereby boost business and leisure tourism on our continent,” adds Ntshona.

Opening Meetings Africa was Thokozile Xasa, the then minister of tourism, who said Africa is growing as a sought after premier business events destination. "As a pan-African event, Meetings Africa serves as a primary platform for Africa's

business events professionals, to showcase their diverse services and product offerings to global buyers and create partnership opportunities with African associations to help transform and contribute towards the continent's economic growth.”

“ By collaborating with like-minded individuals and enterprises, we as Africans can conjure great innovations, bring about economies of scale and transform people's lives, positively and sustainably. ”

This year's Meetings Africa 2018 theme highlights shared economies as a tool to boost and stimulate collaborative African growth. “A big part of Meetings Africa is about engagements, networking, partnership and of course, collaborations and cooperation,” said Xasa.

Collaboration - key to industry transformation

Xasa urged delegates to use the event to explore commonalities, share expertise and forge partnerships with each other to bring about prosperity for their business, the industry and the continent as a whole. “This is in line with the spirit of advancing together, in the year of Nelson Mandela.”

“By collaborating with like-minded individuals and enterprises, we as Africans can conjure great innovations, bring about economies of scale and transform people's lives, positively and sustainably,” added Xasa.

This year Meetings Africa hosted 65 African countries exhibitors out of 301 total business exhibitors. The event was held at the Sandton Convention Centre and attracted nearly 3,000 delegates, producing nearly 6,500 confirmed meetings and nearly 12,500 scheduled meetings. Both figures are up from last year's event.

Locally, tourism was thrust into the limelight when President Cyril Ramaphosa referred to it in his State of the Nation Address. Business tourism sustains over 200,000 jobs and the meetings sector alone contributes R108bn in GDP in South Africa.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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