

Top business travel destinations for 2023 revealed

Corporate Traveller has revealed the top international and regional destinations for South African business travellers for 2023.

"We've decided to have a close look at traveller behaviour, booking patterns, airfares and preferred destinations in January this year as an indication of what the rest of the year will bring us. We've noticed for example that advance booking behaviour has very much remained on par with 2022. Businesses are booking on average 15 days before travelling. What has changed, however, is the top 5 international and regional business destinations and the airfares to get to these destinations," says Bonnie Smith, GM Corporate Traveller.



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London (UK) is a firm favourite for South African business travellers and will remain so in the year to come, says Smith. I

t is also one of the only destinations where airfares have remained the same for 2023 as compared to 2022. Smith explains Heathrow is one of the top international airports for corporate traffic originating from South Africa with many South African businesses having headquarters in the UK or being listed on the London Stock Exchange. "We are therefore not surprised to see London in top position once again this year," says Smith.

"A newcomer in our top three international business destinations, interest in Dubai is definitely picking up," says Smith. Part of the reason for this increased interest is the fact that Emirates has upped the number of flights to South Africa. From March onward, the total frequency of Emirates flights into South Africa will be 42 weekly flights. That does not mean airfares have decreased, says Smith. To the contrary, the price for an Economy Class ticket has increased by 53% in 2023 as compared to 2022.

Inbound tourism to Dubai has flourished in 2022 with the hotels seeing 15-year occupancy highs, according to KPMG. The UAE now hosts one of the richest hospitality markets in the world; with an expected 25% growth in the industry by 2030 and 40 million new visitors staying at hotels in Dubai by 2031.

In third position is Paris, followed by Amsterdam and Mauritius. "With conferences and events picking up, it is not surprising to see Paris, Amsterdam and Mauritius in the top 5," explains Smith. Airfares to Paris are currently affordable and have decreased by 14% as compared to 2022. Meanwhile, Economy Class fares to Amsterdam has increased by 45% and fares to Mauritius by 24%.

Regional figures

The top regional destination for 2023 is Entebbe/Kampala in Uganda. According to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Uganda has been identified as an anchor state for South Africa, particularly given its geo-political position within the East African region; its relative economic size and importance for trade with South Africa and as a destination for South African investment. Airfares to Entebbe are up by 18% as compared to last year.

Nairobi (Kenya) is the second most popular destination for South African business travellers with airfares having only increased slightly by 5%. "Last year, Nairobi was named Africa's leading business travel destination at the World Travel Awards, while the KICC was named 'Africa's Leading Meetings & Conference Centre'. What's more, is that leaders of Kenya and South Africa have been actively collaborating in the past few weeks to address any trade barriers," says Smith.

In third place is Antananarivo (Madagascar). Now that restrictions have been lifted, South Africans can once again enjoy regularly scheduled services to Madagascar, explains Smith. South Africa has always been an important source market and supply-chain link for Madagascar's business and leisure tourism sector. Johannesburg's O.R. Tambo International Airport is well-positioned for Madagascar-based businesses and travellers to access destinations within Southern Africa.

Bamako (Mali) and Lusaka (Zambia) make up number 4 and 5 in the top 5 regional destinations for South Africans. Fares to these destinations have increased by 15%.

"Corporate Traveller has seen strong recovery in terms of business travel with figures in line with – and even exceeding – 2019 levels. And with MICE travel, in particular conferences and events, back with a bang we can expect an exciting year ahead," concludes Smith.