

World Cup Puts Africa Ahead Of The Tourism Game

By: Karen Dabrowska

Media coverage of the World Cup not only focused attention on football. It brought the African continent into the spotlight as a tourist destination and it is not just South Africa which is benefiting.



Abimbola Carrol
of Visit Sierra
Leone

African destinations were very well represented at this year's World Travel Market (WTM) with impressive stands from Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Nigeria, Gabon, Ghana,

Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia, Swaziland, and Sierra Leone.

The WTM's official catalogue described Africa as the only region to post positive growth in 2009 in terms of international tourist arrivals. Africa was up 6% for the year to June. The first quarter's increase was higher at 8% but this slowed in April – largely due to the closure of Europe's skies for more than a week as a result of the volcanic ash cloud from Iceland.

Tour operators are according increasing importance to Africa: London based Advancing Tourism To Africa (ATTA) is working with Travel Uni, the travel industry's leading online training supplier to showcase and educate travel agents on 18 African destinations. ATTA members include the best tour and ground operators offering African safari and beach holidays along with the best hotels, lodges and camps.

African section of the WTM





South Africa's Blue Train was voted the world's most luxurious train by the international travel trade. It got its name from its distinctive sapphire-blue carriages. The track, originally laid in the 19th century in an audacious bid to connect Africa's southern tip with Cairo, stretches nearly 2,000 miles from Cape Town, South Africa's capital, north through Pretoria and up to the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe.

The Africa Travel Association, the

leading travel industry trade association promoting tourism to Africa, has signed a partnership agreement with the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), that will support both organizations' endeavours to promote tourism to their respective regions.

"CTO and ATA both understand the value in building a strong link between the African diaspora in both the Caribbean and Africa and the role tourism promotion and

investment can play in this process," said Edward Bergman, ATA Executive Director. "ATA is excited to partner with CTO and to learn from the association's vast experience in turning the Caribbean into one of the world's most popular destinations under the banner of the "Caribbean."

While ATA is focusing on the Caribbean, Zimbabwe is making significant advances into the Middle Eastern market. Speaking

to Islamic Tourism Magazine at the WTM, Zimbabwe's Minister of Tourism & Hospitality, Hon. Eng W Mzembi, said that Zimbabwe and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding on tourism to jointly promote each others destinations. Mzembi visited Iran to attend the 80th executive council meeting of the UNWTO and a reciprocal visit from the Iranian Minister of Tourism is expected. There is a probability of direct flights between Tehran and Harare.



Ghana

Ghanian stand



Zimbabwe is also reaching out to Algeria and Turkey and it is hoped that flights to the UAE will be reinstated after their suspension during what Mzembe called Zimbabwe's «period of isolation». He proudly described how Colonel's Qadhafi's son Saif Al Islam came to Zimbabwe on a one week holiday and ended up staying three weeks because «he liked it so much».

According to the World Travel and

Tourism Council (WTTC) Zimbabwe has the third fastest growing tourism economy after Lebanon and Qatar and it will be the fastest growing tourism economy with a growth rate of 8.2 percent a year.

While Zimbabwe has managed to shake off its image as a troubled state – the number of British visitors rose by 97 percent, the same cannot be said of Sierra Leone.

"The war finished in 2002 but a lot of people are still not aware that its over", said Abimbola Carrol, Managing Director of Visit Sierra Leone. "We have had two democratic elections but bad news travels fast and sticks in your head longer".

The Bradt Travel guide to Sierra Leone has assisted in the promotion of the country as a tourist destination which is renowned for the unique pygmy

hippos on Tiwai Island. Visit Sierra Leone is promoting the beautiful beaches on the peninsula. There are also excursions to Bunce Island a former slave port and the Gola Forest, a magnificent adventure for nature lovers.

One of the leading countries in Africa for tourism is Kenya which continued its post-election rebound. Tourist numbers registered an 18.9% growth in the first quarter of 2010. Kenya's



Hon Eng Mzembi
Zimbabwean
Minister of tourism
& Hospitality
Industry



tourist industry is centred around the national parks – 51 in total. The country also has 480km of beautiful beaches along the coast.

Ten thousand crocodiles wait for visitors in the Mamba Village Crocodile Park.



In Nairobi the country's 42 tribes showcase their culture in the Bomas (homestead) where they have recreated their local huts and perform traditional dances. Kenya's capital is also home to the country's largest mosque, the Nairobi Jamia which can accommodate 23,000 worshippers.

Tufayn Mangal the general manager of Glory Safaris can arrange safaris in Kenya, Tanzania

and Uganda. Some of the trips begin in Kenya's most popular national park the Masai Mara and finish in the Serengeti in Tanzania. And if you don't see a cheetah or a leopard in the wild there is always the Orphanage in Nairobi's National Park inside the city.

While in some African countries like Kenya tourism is the mainstay of the economy, in other countries like Ethiopia it is developing slowly. Fitsum Gezahegne of Paradise



Safari tent on the Kenyan stand

Tufayn Mangal of
Glory Safaris Kenya



Ethiopia Travel described the country as a new market for tourism (off the beat and track).

The infrastructure is developing to make the seven world heritage sites: Axum, the rock hewn churches of Lalibela, the Semien National Park, the Fasildes Palace, the Lower Valley of the Omo, Tiya and the City of Harrar more accessible.

The Nigerian stand, with its slogan "tourism is life", captured the prevailing sentiment at this year's WTM. The goal of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation is to make Nigeria the foremost tourism destination in Africa and to position tourism as a major pillar of the economy.

In the words of NTDC's Director General Otonba Olusegun

Nigerian tourism has diverse offerings which are waiting for investors in such areas as ecology, beach front, conference and events, hospitality and sports, to name a few.

Following the success of the 2010 FIFA World Cup which saw hundreds of tourists converge on

South Africa both the Rainbow Nation and other African countries used this year's WTM to show the rest of the world that the passion and excitement generated by football continues to live on. The World Cup was a one of event but visitors are made welcome by every African country throughout the year.

Ugandan stand

