

'Mobile' air travel to grow in Africa

Booking and paying for air tickets and hotel accommodation using cellphones is expected to be the future for Africa's aviation industry, airline information technology company Sita said on Tuesday (20 November).

However, the continent's aviation sector also faces the challenge of improving its image and safety standards after the European Commission in April banned operations of more than 100 African airlines, citing safety concerns.

The African Airlines Association (Afraa) committed itself to improving the image of the continent at its general assembly in Johannesburg, saying a positive image of the aviation industry was an important part of economic growth.

Passenger numbers are expected to grow significantly between now and 2030.

April's bans were imposed on a third of African states, including Angola, Benin and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Afraa secretary-general Elijah Chingosho said governments were a vital cog in ensuring safety standards were adhered to by airlines throughout Africa.

"There is tremendous potential and urgent pressure on us as leaders of our organisations to facilitate, support and bring real change to our industry. We do not see why airlines that do not fly to the European Union (EU) should be on the banned list.

"We also do not see why EU carriers fly to states that are deemed unsafe," Chingosho said.

The International Air Transport Association (Iata) had undertaken to sponsor safety courses to help three airlines attain International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) safety certification, Chingosho said.

Regarding mobile travel, Sita's vice-president of sales in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, Paul Murphy, said that while Africa's aviation industry was going through challenging times, there were opportunities for growth.

"The key issue is going to be co-operation between the agencies and whether police at airports, immigration and government entities allow that process to happen when everyone is used to paper travel," Murphy said. He said that Sita was well placed to facilitate collaboration between airlines, airports and aviation authorities.

"By the year 2015 it is believed that 9% of airlines will be using smartphone technologies to facilitate travel bookings.

"In Africa, this is a huge opportunity because of the (better) penetration of mobile infrastructure compared with landline

infrastructure," he said.

Murphy said Sita's engagements with the aviation industry showed that it was expecting the Internet and mobile connectivity to grow.

"CIOs (chief information officers) are telling us smartphone and web service adoption will be the two dominant channels for how the customers interact with the aviation industry."

Iata vice-president Tom Windmuller said aviation's contribution to Africa's gross domestic product would increase by 5% a year over the next 20 years, which would add 66,000 jobs. "All of this development will only be sustainable if the aviation sector makes money and, unfortunately, aviation is not making a lot of it."

Iata's forecast last month estimated that collectively African airlines will make no profit this year.

Boeing Commercial Airplanes vice-president of sales Van Rex Gallard said Africa would need 900 new airliners by 2031.

Source: *Business Day* via I-Net Bridge

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