Pan African E-Tourism conferences to boost online marketing for 2010

A new initiative to develop Africa's tourism and travel sector was launched the week. For the first time in Africa, E-Tourism conferences will be held across the continent to assist Africa's tourism sector to better understand the internet and the range of online marketing opportunities now available, especially in the lead up to the FIFA 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

The E-Tourism Africa conferences, which will be held across Africa, will bring together global online and digital experts, from companies such as Expedia, Google, Digital Visitor, Microsoft, Eviivo, New Mind, WAYN (Where Are You Now?) the world's largest social network for travellers with over 12 Million members and many more. The international experts will address conference delegates about the new technologies available, as well as highlighting marketing and e-commerce solutions, the best use of social networking, the implications of blogging and the importance of user generated content and online video for the travel trade.

The conferences are being organised by E-Tourism Africa, a major new initiative to bring online tourism-focused education to Africa, in conjunction with Microsoft and Eye for Travel. First National Bank (FNB) is the title sponsor of the Southern African conference. The conference is also being supported by Visa International, Microsoft and the Johannesburg Tourism Company.

The managing director of E-Tourism Africa, Damian Cook, explains the reasons for the conferences, "It is vital that the tourism sector in Africa becomes aware of the vast online opportunities for their businesses. The internet is becoming the leading source of travel information and sales for the modern consumer, yet very little African tourism is sold online and finding and booking African destinations on the web can be a challenge."

He went on to say, "Up till now there has been very little information available to the travel trade in Africa on how they can maximise their online presence. The aim of E-Tourism Africa is to alter the imbalance between the way tourism is marketed and sold globally and in Africa, where traditional sales channels still dominate. This disparity presents a very real threat for Africa, as Africa risks disappearing from the view of online travel shoppers."

Also launched this week was the E-Tourism Africa website, www.e-tourismafrica.com, which gives detailed information about the conferences as well as providing a library of resources on online travel and a forum for discussion groups on e tourism issues in Africa.

The first E-Tourism Africa conference will focus on the Southern African region and will be held on the 1-2 September at the FNB Building in Fairland, Johannesburg. Following the Southern Africa event, the East Africa conference will be held in Nairobi on the 13-14 October this year. Conferences are then planned for Cairo and Ghana in early 2009, culminating in a Pan African event mid 2009.

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