

Tourism sector sets record for first-half arrivals

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Tourist arrivals in South Africa grew 5.1% during the first six months of this year compared with last year and the tourism sector injected R35.3bn into the economy during this time, Tourism Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk said this week.



Marthinus van Schalkwyk says that the tourism sector generated more cash for the economy than gold exports in the first six months of this year. Image: GQS

A record 4,642,217 international tourists arrived in the country in the first six months of this year.

The minister said the sector was a key driver of growth and employment, contributing more to the economy than the R32.6bn derived from gold exports during the first six months.

"Over a four-year period, we have averaged 9.4% compound annual growth for the first half of the year, despite ever-increasing global competition, tough trading conditions in some of our source markets and the fluctuating rand," Van Schalkwyk said.

Last year, the year-on-year growth in the first six months was 10.5%, which the minister said indicated South Africa had consolidated the significant gains achieved in 2010-12 on the back of the Fifa 2010 World Cup.

He said the growth in tourist arrivals was recorded from all regions, in line with global averages for the period. Global growth during

Tourist arrivals in South Africa from Europe grew 5.5% during the first six months with 675,595 people coming to the

country, up from 640,231 arrivals a year earlier.

the first six months as recorded by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation was 5.2%.

Asian markets add some spice

Arrivals from Germany - the third-biggest source market for South Africa - grew 13.8%, while the number of French visitors increased by 10.8% and by 7.1 from Italy.

Van Schalkwyk said that two traditionally strong markets, the UK and the Netherlands, were still under pressure and recorded marginal declines in arrivals of 0.6% and 1.2%, respectively, during this period.

The number of visitors from North America grew 3.7% from 187,703 to 194,586 people.

"For us to compete as a destination in the current economic environment, where many travellers in our traditional core markets are choosing to travel for shorter periods and closer to home, we need to work harder than ever to be seen as a destination that offers exceptional value for money," Van Schalkwyk said.

"Working with our private-sector partners, we are focused on nurturing this value proposition," he added.

Asian tourist growth was 12.7% (up from 186,981 to 210,776), with 23.9% more Chinese visitors coming to South Africa and Indian visitors numbers rising by 11%.

Arrivals from Africa increased 4.8%, with strong growth recorded from West African markets such as Ghana (27.3%) and Nigeria (15.9%), admittedly off a low base.

"We remain confident there will be further growth in tourism from West and East Africa," the minister said.

A South African Tourism office will be opened in Lagos next month to provide a base for South Africa's marketing efforts in the region.

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