

Ministers adopt UNWTO programme to develop tourism in Africa

During the 61st meeting of the Commission for Africa in Abuja, Nigeria, Africa's tourism ministers adopted a comprehensive programme established by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) to strengthen its role in Africa's economy.



Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom participating in a panel discussion moderated by SA's top Statistician, Pali Lehohla at the UNWTO-CAF meeting in Abuja, Nigeria.

"This is a significant milestone for tourism on our continent. We have agreed to implement a series of measures which will develop and grow tourism in a way that advances economic transformation across Africa. Tourism has untapped potential to transform the economies of many countries on the continent. The programme provides all our countries with a shared plan to unlock this potential for the benefit of all our people," said Derek Hanekom, South Africa's Minister of Tourism who was the vice-chairperson at the meeting.

Last year Africa welcomed 62 million visitors, which is only 5% of the world's travellers, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation. The UNWTO believes that arrivals could double in the next decade with the right collaboration, policies and investment into the sector. Africa's tourism sector grew by 8% in 2017, about 1% above the global average, and continued growth is expected in the future.

Tourism already contributes about 8% to Africa's GDP and employs 6.5% of the workforce directly and indirectly, according to the UNWTO.

The programme identifies ten focus areas for developing tourism:

- Enhancing Brand Africa by addressing negative perceptions,

- Facilitating travel, air connectivity and visas through improved regulations,
- Strengthening systems to collect tourism statistics,
- Building capacity through training facilities and promoting certification,
- Promoting innovation and technology,
- Managing crisis communication and media messaging by addressing information. needs of all stakeholders,
- Promoting and attracting investment through public-private partnerships and fostering entrepreneurship,
- Empowering youth and women through building capacity and creating opportunities,
- Advancing sustainability and biodiversity through strengthening practices and wildlife conservation, and
- Promoting cultural heritage effective strategies and policies.

Hanekom said South Africa's recently revised National Tourism Sector Strategy was already closely aligned to the goals embodied in the UNWTO's development programme. "We will not need to make major changes to our national developmental policies or growth strategy in South Africa to fulfil the goals of the programme. We are on the right track, and we are ready to support and collaborate with our sister countries on the continent to implement the program and transform our economies," said Hanekom.

South Africa was elected as one of the vice-chairs of CAF until 2019 at the 60th meeting in Chengdu, China, last year. The chair is Kenya and the other vice-chair is Gambia.

The meeting noted that a tourism programme and supportive institutional mechanisms were being developed under the African Union. Tourism ministers called for closer collaboration and harmonisation between the tourism development work of the UNWTO and the AU.