

Africa

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MEETS



Africa's
MICE
Renaissance

*ILT^M Africa and the Repositioning
of Africa on the Global Luxury Map*



In this ISSUE



05

Editor / Publisher's Note

06

Why the continent is emerging as the world's next high-growth meetings and business events frontier

10

Africa Set for Strong Showing at IMEX Frankfurt as Buyer Interest Grows

12

Ethiopia Signals MICE Readiness as Africa's Business Events Map Expands

14

International Congress and Convention Association sets its sights on Africa's next growth chapter

16

Africa's Business Events Sector Comes of Age as Collaboration Takes Centre Stage

19

AFRICA SHOWCASE: Taking African Tourism to the World, One Market at a Time

22

Cape Town and The Western Cape: Africa's Luxury & MICE Powerhouse on the Global Stage

26

East Africa's Tourism Trade Show Circuit: The Platforms Defining the Region's Leisure, Luxury and MICE Future

28

A Continent at the Crossroads – Africa's Quiet Fight to Change the Meetings Map

31

Meetings Africa 2026 closes on a high, Celebrating 20 Years of Purposeful African Connections

34

Sunbird Hotels & Resorts Positions Malawi for MICE Growth at Meetings Africa 2026

36

ILTM Africa and the Repositioning of Africa on the Global Luxury Map

40

Knowledge Before Concrete: Gilbert Abeiku Aggrey's Vision for Ghana at Meetings Africa 2026

43

North Africa's MICE Readiness – Quiet Scale, Strategic Advantage

48

Association Focus at IMEX Frankfurt sets the pace for a changing association landscape

50

Why the African Travel Trade Show is thriving in a digital era

52

10 facts about MICE & Luxury Travel in Africa

56

ATLF Returns in 2026: Why Africa's Tourism Leadership Platform Matters More Than Ever

58

AviaDev Africa 2026: Botswana Leads the Charge on Continent's Air Connectivity Revival

62

Janet Karemera on Rwanda's MICE Strategy: Building Kigali into Africa's Benchmark Meetings Destination

66

Seychelles: Where Incentive Travel Becomes an Experience of a Lifetime

70

Enabling Africa's MICE Sector Through Inclusive Digital Innovation

76

The Durban Nexus: Why Indaba 2026 is Africa's Narrative High-Ground

68

Inside ILTM Africa: Why This Is Not Just Another Luxury Travel Trade Show



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Editor/ Publisher's Note



Africa is not emerging into the global meetings and business events space – it is firmly establishing itself within it. Across the continent, MICE, business travel, and experiential convening have become powerful drivers of economic growth, investment, diplomacy, and destination branding.

Africa Meets is created for this moment.

The publication exists to tell Africa's MICE and business travel story with depth, credibility, and confidence. It is a platform designed to connect destinations, decision-makers, investors, organisers, and innovators, while presenting Africa's meetings and events ecosystem through an African lens with a global perspective.

For too long, Africa's role in global business tourism has been under-represented or fragmented. Africa Meets brings coherence to that narrative by curating insight, analysis, and intelligence that reflect the continent's ambitions, infrastructure growth, policy direction, and creative energy. From convention centres and luxury hospitality

to hybrid events, sustainability, and destination strategy, we examine how Africa is hosting the world on its own terms.

Our inaugural edition launches at a defining time. As intra-African trade accelerates, global partnerships deepen, and cities invest in world-class venues and experiences, MICE is increasingly recognised as a strategic tool for economic transformation. Cities such as Cape Town, Kigali, Accra, Nairobi, and others are not simply venues – they are convening hubs where business, culture, and ideas intersect.

Africa Meets is more than a magazine. It is a trusted industry platform, a meeting point for thought leadership, and a voice for Africa in the global business events conversation.

This is where ideas converge.

This is where business connects.

This is where Africa meets the world.

Francis Doku
Publisher & Managing Editor
Africa Meets



Why the continent is emerging as the world's next high-growth meetings and business events frontier

Staff Writer

The global Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) industry has emerged as one of the most dynamic segments within business tourism, characterised by robust growth, deepening commercial value and expanding global integration. Valued in recent years at more than half a trillion US dollars globally, the sector's trajectory points towards sustained expansion — with forecasts indicating continued double-digit compound annual growth.

Yet Africa's stake in this global opportunity has historically been modest, even as the continent's potential for business events has never been clearer. Economic shifts, enhanced connectivity, rising demand for immersive experiences and an increasing number of purpose-built facilities offer a compelling backdrop for Africa's MICE renaissance.

Global MICE: Scale, Growth and Opportunity

The MICE industry remains a powerhouse within the global tourism and business travel ecosystem. In 2023, the sector was estimated to be worth approximately USD 523.3 billion worldwide, with forecasts suggesting it could soar well beyond USD 1.38 trillion by 2032. Within this vast market, meetings and exhibitions spur significant economic activity, fostering international dialogue, corporate engagement and cross-border investment flows.

The broader business travel ecosystem — of which MICE is the most commercially valuable subset — also shows parallel expansion, with total business travel expenditures forecast to grow into the multi-trillion dollar arena over the next



decade. This underscores not only the value of MICE itself but its symbiosis with global trade, policy engagement and destination competitiveness.

Despite these global fundamentals, Africa's current share of this expansive market is limited. Analysts and sector insiders estimate that the continent captures about four per cent of global MICE activity — a figure that highlights both the scale of the challenge and the breadth of the opportunity.

Africa's Growth Story Begins in Earnest

The African business events sector is significantly smaller than those in North America, Europe or Asia-Pacific, yet it has been outpacing these markets in terms of growth rates in some localised segments. One comprehensive market analysis projects that Africa's MICE industry could grow from around USD 10.5 billion in 2022 to over USD 65.6 billion by 2032, at a compound annual growth rate approaching 17 per cent.

The meetings subset remains the most dominant segment within the continent's MICE market, accounting for more than 60 per cent of total activity. Conventions and

incentives also show strong expansion, with the incentives segment growing rapidly as corporations increasingly embrace experiential travel for talent retention and client engagement.

South Africa continues to hold the lead among African hubs, reflecting a combination of infrastructure maturity, global connectivity, and institutional experience. In 2023, the South African MICE market was estimated at just over USD 6.6

billion, and national forecasts anticipate continued expansion as the industry leverages both international demand and domestic capacity.

Structural Barriers and Strategic Actions

Africa's relatively modest market share is not for lack of opportunity, but rather a combination of structural and strategic hurdles that have constrained full realisation of potential.

A key factor has been the infrastructure gap faced by many destinations — from airport connectivity and visa facilitation to world-class convention facilities and modern event logistics. Fragmented marketing and limited co-ordinated positioning have also hindered Africa's ability to compete for high-value global events, particularly when compared with well-resourced destinations in Europe and Asia.





Yet significant action is underway across the continent. Governments, private sector players and regional alliances are investing in destination marketing and institution building, such as the establishment of dedicated national convention bureaux and public-private collaborations to secure key bids. In Kenya's case, industry stakeholders have been calling for a convention bureau and stronger infrastructure to better position the country within global MICE circuits.

South Africa, meanwhile, has intensified its efforts to attract major international conferences and exhibitions, leveraging its global ranking and investment in bid strategies to secure scores of events over the coming years. Other destinations, including Rwanda and Morocco, are focusing on niche strengths — from sustainable conference experiences to integrated technology expos — signalling a more diversified African MICE landscape.

Innovation, Technology and Immersive Experiences

Beyond bricks and mortar, technology is transforming

how meetings and events are planned, delivered and experienced. From hybrid formats and AI-enhanced attendee matchmaking to digital lead capture and immersive virtual experiences, the evolution of event technology is lowering barriers to international engagement and expanding the potential reach of African hosts.

African planners and venues are increasingly embracing such innovations, recognising that the future of MICE will be shaped by agility, data intelligence and seamless digital-physical integration. These trends not only enhance attendee experience but also improve destination competitiveness in a world where convenience and interactivity shape selection criteria.

A New Era of Opportunity

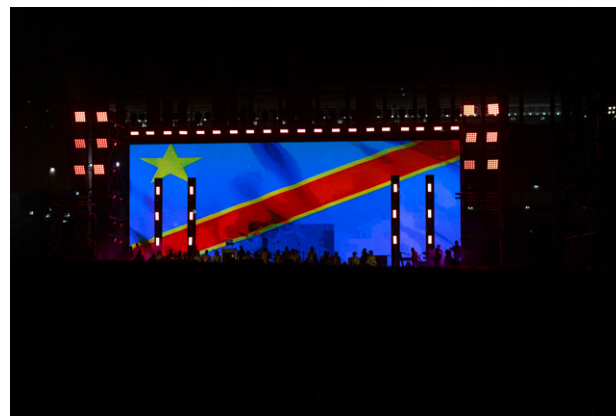
The narrative of Africa's MICE renaissance is not one of passive growth, but strategic ambition. The convergence of targeted investment, policy prioritisation, technology adoption

and rising corporate confidence creates conditions for accelerated expansion. As infrastructure gaps narrow and connectivity improves, the continent's share of global business events could look very different by the end of this decade.

The MICE sector's impact extends far beyond tourism receipts. It supports SMEs, attracts foreign investment, strengthens knowledge economies and amplifies national brands on the global stage. As global organisers seek destinations that offer authenticity, sustainability and growth potential, Africa's value proposition has never been stronger.

More importantly, the MICE sector's multiplier effects — from job creation and SME engagement to knowledge exchange and global partnerships — position it as a lever for broader socio-economic development. Africa is not merely aiming to host more events; it is striving to become a trusted, competitive and indispensable participant in the global meetings economy.

This renaissance is underway — and Africa Meets is here to document, interpret and advance it.





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Africa Set for Strong Showing at IMEX Frankfurt as Buyer Interest Grows

By Francis Doku, Johannesburg

Africa is positioning itself for one of its strongest outings yet at IMEX Frankfurt 2026, reflecting growing global demand for the continent as a competitive destination for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE).

Speaking to VoyagesAfric during Meetings Africa 2026, Alex Donaldson, Head of Sales – Asia and Africa at IMEX, said early indicators point to the largest and most diverse African participation the show has seen to date.

“May is going to be very significant for Africa,” Donaldson said. “At this stage, we are seeing what could be the largest representation from the continent at IMEX Frankfurt.”

IMEX Frankfurt will take place from 19–21 May 2026 at Messe Frankfurt, bringing together more than 3,000 exhibitors from over 100 countries and close to 3,800 qualified buyers from across the global business events ecosystem.

Southern and Eastern Africa drive momentum

South Africa remains the anchor destination from the continent and is expected once again to field the largest

IMEX FRANKFURT
19.-21. MAI 2026

African delegation. Rwanda has confirmed its participation, while Uganda is returning to the show after an absence in recent years.

“It’s really good to have Uganda back,” Donaldson noted. “They haven’t been at the show for the last couple of editions, so it’s encouraging to see them confirmed again.”

Kenya is also expected to return, likely under a collective destination structure, while Zambia has confirmed its participation. Namibia, meanwhile, is planning to attend IMEX Frankfurt for the first time, signalling growing confidence in its business events offering.

One of the notable new entrants for 2026 is Angola.

“Angola is brand new for us,” Donaldson said. “Given what’s happening in the country in terms of development and ambition, having Luanda represented again for the first time in many years is a really exciting story.”

She also confirmed that Seychelles will be represented, alongside convention bureaux and destination partners from across Eastern and Southern Africa. Senegal, Donaldson added, is actively considering participation for 2026.

Buyer demand shaping Africa’s growth

According to Donaldson, Africa’s growing footprint at IMEX is being driven primarily by buyer interest.

“We do a lot of analysis around the show,” she explained. “What we see very clearly is strong and growing interest from buyers in Africa as a destination. That demand is encouraging more African partners to take part.”

While South Africa remains the continent’s largest exhibitor, Donaldson emphasised that many destinations attend with smaller, focused delegations.

“For some destinations, it’s not about size,” she said. “It’s about coming with clear objectives, meeting the right buyers and using the platform effectively.”



Design takes centre stage at IMEX

For 2026–2027, IMEX has placed Design Matters at the centre of its Talking Point agenda, positioning design as a strategic differentiator rather than a decorative layer. As the global business events industry navigates digital acceleration and experiential fatigue, the focus is shifting towards intentional, human-centred event design.

According to Carina Bauer, CEO of IMEX Group, meaningful design underpins stronger outcomes. “When we move past surface-level networking and find people that share our values, the events industry really shines,” she has said, linking design to what IMEX

increasingly defines as Return on Relationship.

At IMEX Frankfurt 2026, the Design Matters theme will be embedded across education sessions, content programming and the show’s physical environment, reinforcing the role of purposeful design in creating relevance, engagement and long-term value.

A platform for business, learning and connection

Donaldson stressed that IMEX is, at its core, a business platform rather than a traditional trade show.

“Our role is to create the environment for business to happen,” she said. “We don’t just matchmake – we provide

the space, the structure and the opportunity for meaningful connections.”

IMEX also supports exhibitors, particularly emerging destinations, through education, coaching and on-site guidance.

“We’re constantly learning – from regions, from markets and from each other,” she added. “That shared learning is a big part of what makes the platform work.”

With buyer demand rising and African destinations increasingly confident in their MICE propositions, IMEX Frankfurt 2026 is shaping up as a critical global stage for Africa’s business events story.

Ethiopia Signals MICE Readiness as Africa's Business Events Map Expands

By Francis Doku, Johannesburg



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Ethiopia has made a clear decision to position itself as a conference and meetings destination. Every ministry has been mandated to attract and host large-scale conferences. This is a top-down strategy, and it's already translating into action.

As Africa's meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) sector continues to mature, Ethiopia is emerging as one of the continent's most ambitious and purposeful contenders. That message came through clearly at Meetings Africa, currently underway in Johannesburg, where Ethiopia's growing confidence as a business events destination was firmly in focus.

Speaking to *VoyagesAfric* on the sidelines of the trade show, Yoadan Tilahun, Chief Executive Officer of Addis Ababa based Flawless Events, said Ethiopia's MICE push is being driven decisively from the top, backed by government commitment and accelerated infrastructure development.

"Ethiopia has made a clear decision to position itself as a conference and meetings destination," Tilahun said. "Every ministry has been mandated to attract and host large-scale conferences. This is a top-down strategy, and it's already translating into action."

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The city has shown that it can rise to the occasion. When the need arises, the infrastructure follows.

A destination preparing at scale

Ethiopia's recent and upcoming event pipeline is a strong indicator of its preparedness. The country will host the COP32 climate summit in 2027, which is expected to attract more than 50,000 to 60,000 delegates, a logistical undertaking that Tilahun describes as a confidence booster for the destination.

"That level of hosting is a huge testament to the country's capabilities," she said. "It's not that Addis Ababa necessarily has all that capacity sitting idle today, but what Ethiopia has proven time and again is its ability to build capacity very quickly and very efficiently."

According to Tilahun, Ethiopia's aviation infrastructure, led by Addis Ababa's international gateway, already has the scale and operational maturity to support mega-events, while accommodation and venue capacity continue to expand in response to demand.

"The city has shown that it can rise to the occasion," she noted. "When the need arises, the infrastructure follows."

Flawless Events without borders

For Flawless Events, Ethiopia's rise mirrors a broader continental opportunity. The company operates across Africa, supporting conferences, summits and large-scale gatherings without being tied to a single destination.

"We don't have boundaries," Tilahun explained. "What we bring to the table is knowledge, experience and the ability to translate a client's objectives into reality. You don't need to own venues or equipment to do that – you need to understand destinations deeply."

That understanding is precisely why Meetings Africa remains important to her work. Tilahun said she uses the platform to assess destinations

comparatively – from venues and infrastructure to government support and overall readiness.

"I'm here because I'm pricing and planning events across different countries," she said. "I need to understand what each destination offers so I can recommend the right country for the right event."

Flawless Events has worked across several African markets, including Ghana, where the company has supported high-level engagements and relationship-building with venues and public sector stakeholders.

"Our role is to build the relationships, identify the venues and work with governments on facilitation," she said. "It's about making it easier for Africa to host Africa – and the world."

Culture, confidence and connection

Beyond infrastructure, Tilahun believes Ethiopia's cultural depth adds a compelling layer to its MICE proposition. She points to the scale and symbolism of national celebrations, including Ethiopian Christmas in early January, which in recent years has drawn unprecedented public participation.

"There's something happening culturally," she observed. "The scale of these gatherings is growing, and it shows the country's ability to mobilise people, manage crowds and deliver experiences."

As Africa's MICE sector becomes more competitive and more confident, Tilahun sees destinations like Ethiopia playing an increasingly important role in reshaping perceptions.

"What we're seeing is Africa taking control of its own meetings narrative," she said. "Ethiopia is ready, and Meetings Africa is the kind of platform that helps the continent tell that story properly."

International Congress and Convention Association sets its sights on Africa's next growth chapter

By Francis Doku



As Africa's business events ecosystem continues its steady ascent, the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) is sharpening its focus on the continent – not simply as a growth market, but as a strategic pillar of the global meetings industry.

Speaking to *VoyagesAfric* on the sidelines of Meetings Africa 2026 in Johannesburg, ICCA Chief Executive Officer

Dr Senthil Gopinath outlined a clear and deliberate vision: Africa's business events growth must be purpose-driven, capability-led and globally positioned.

"We never look at Africa purely from a numbers perspective," Dr Gopinath said. "Our focus is on how ICCA can assist the continent to grow its business events ecosystem in a sustainable and structured way."

Beyond membership numbers

Dr Gopinath was clear that ICCA's engagement with Africa goes far beyond increasing membership counts. Instead, the emphasis is on ecosystem development – supporting destinations as they mature and integrate into the global meetings economy.

Across the continent, new convention bureaux are being established, infrastructure is expanding, and cities are

investing in convention centres, hotels and commercial hubs.

"We are seeing new destinations coming on stream, new bureaux opening up, and facilities developing across Africa. ICCA's role is to advocate for the sector across the entire continent, while supporting skills development, knowledge transfer and stakeholder engagement."

He stressed that education remains foundational to growth. "Education is critical. Destinations must understand not just how to attract meetings, but how to sustain growth and deliver value over time."

Meetings Africa as a knowledge platform

For ICCA, Meetings Africa has evolved into more than a trade show – it is a continental knowledge and engagement platform.

"I have been coming to Meetings Africa for the last five years, and the growth has been phenomenal," Dr Gopinath observed. "Not just in size, but in the quality of engagement and the depth of international participation."

He noted that the event is increasingly attracting global experts who both share knowledge and learn from Africa, reinforcing a two-way exchange that is essential for long-term credibility.

"This kind of platform is not about size. It is about purpose. Purposeful growth delivers lasting impact."

Africa's global validation – ICCA Congress 2027

One of the clearest signals of Africa's rising stature in the global meetings industry is the decision to award the ICCA Congress 2027 to Rwanda – a milestone Dr Gopinath described as deeply symbolic.



"It sends a strong message that Africa is no longer on the margins of global business events. The world is recognising the continent's readiness, professionalism and potential."

The Congress, ICCA's flagship global gathering, will bring the world's leading association executives, destination leaders and policymakers to Africa, further amplifying the continent's visibility and credibility.

Momentum is building

While Africa currently accounts for roughly 4% of global business events activity, ICCA data shows that the continent has been one of the fastest-growing regions globally, recording more than 25 per cent growth in membership participation and engagement in recent years.

"I see significant momentum building in Africa through 2026, 2027 and 2028," Dr Gopinath said. "We already have a strategic plan in place for the next three years, and the outlook is extremely positive."

What matters most, he added, is not how many members join, but how deeply stakeholders engage across the ecosystem.

A market delivering real impact

South Africa's Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, noted during the opening of Meetings Africa trading floor that the event's economic contribution has nearly doubled over the past three years – from R371 million in 2023 to R690 million in 2025 – while sustaining more than 2,600 jobs.

For ICCA, such figures reinforce the argument that business events are not symbolic – they are economic infrastructure.

Purpose before scale

As Africa positions itself more assertively within the global meetings industry, ICCA's message remains consistent: growth must be intentional, inclusive and globally aligned.

"Africa's opportunity is immense," Dr Gopinath said. "But real success will come from purposeful development – building destinations, people and systems that can compete confidently on the world stage."

With Kigali set to host the ICCA Congress in 2027 and platforms such as Meetings Africa continuing to mature, Africa's business events future is no longer hypothetical – it is actively being built.

Africa's Business Events Sector Comes of Age as Collaboration Takes Centre Stage

By Francis Doku, Johannesburg

There was a distinct sense of purpose at the Sandton Convention Centre as Meetings Africa 2026 unfolded. From the opening of the trade floor to the final networking exchanges, the continent's flagship business events delivered more than meetings and presentations – it delivered confidence. Confidence that Africa is no longer asking to be considered as a meeting destination, but asserting its place in the global MICE conversation.

Now marking its 20th anniversary, Meetings Africa has grown into a mature, results-driven marketplace for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions. Organised by South African Tourism, the event has evolved from a market-access platform into a strategic convening point for African destinations, global buyers and industry leaders. Over two decades, it has helped professionalise the continent's business events sector, strengthened convention bureaux and exposed destinations to the demands of a highly competitive global market.



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When business events work, the impact is systemic. They fill hotels, drive transport and logistics, support small businesses and create global visibility for cities and regions. Few sectors deliver that level of multiplier effect.

What was particularly striking in 2026 was not just the scale of participation, but the quality of engagement. Appointments were purposeful, conversations were informed and exhibitors arrived with clarity about what they wanted to achieve. Across the exhibition floor, the focus was on relationships that endure beyond the show – a hallmark of a sector that understands long-term value.

That emphasis on relationships was echoed by Glenton De Kock, Chief Executive Officer of the South African Association for the Conference Industry, who reflected on Meetings Africa's journey and its wider significance for the continent.

"When Meetings Africa started 20 years ago, one of its greatest strengths was the networks it created," De Kock said. "Those early relationships translated into real business over time, and today we are seeing the benefits of that long-term thinking."

For De Kock, Meetings Africa represents more than an annual trade show. It is a barometer of Africa's readiness to compete globally – and a catalyst for further growth.

Beyond three percent

Africa currently attracts around three percent of the global business events market, a statistic often cited as evidence of untapped potential. De Kock believes the continent should be far more ambitious.

"Growing beyond 10 percent is not unrealistic," he said. "But it requires a shift in mindset – from fragmented competition to strategic collaboration."

According to him, Africa's opportunity lies not in chasing every event, but in targeting the right ones – association meetings, sector-specific congresses and knowledge-driven events that rotate internationally and deliver legacy benefits.

"These are events that come back," he explained. "They grow skills, create intellectual capital and build destination reputation. If Africa aligns its bidding strategies with its development goals, the returns go far beyond delegate numbers."

Meetings Africa, he added, plays a critical role in preparing destinations for that level of competition by exposing them to buyer expectations, encouraging collaboration and reinforcing professional standards.

Infrastructure, alignment and credibility

Over the past two decades, the continent's progress has been underpinned by investment in infrastructure – convention centres, hotels, air connectivity and professional conference services. Meetings Africa 2026 reflected that maturity, with destinations presenting integrated offerings that combined venues, accommodation, experiences and government support.

During the official opening, South Africa's Minister of Tourism underlined the economic impact of the event itself, noting that over the past three years, Meetings Africa's contribution to GDP has nearly doubled, while supporting thousands of jobs across the tourism and events value chain. For many delegates, those figures reinforced the argument that

business events are not a luxury, but a strategic economic tool.

De Kock agrees. "When business events work, the impact is systemic," he said. "They fill hotels, drive transport and logistics, support small businesses and create global visibility for cities and regions. Few sectors deliver that level of multiplier effect."

Collaboration as Africa's advantage

One of the strongest themes emerging from Meetings Africa 2026 was the growing appetite for collaboration – between neighbouring countries, between cities and between the public and private sectors. From shared bids to regional air access discussions, the message was clear: Africa's competitiveness lies in its ability to work together.

"No destination succeeds in isolation," De Kock said. "When Africa presents itself as a connected ecosystem, buyers respond."

As the trade floor gave way to networking cocktails and informal exchanges, that sense of shared purpose was evident. Deals were advanced, partnerships initiated and future bids quietly shaped in conversations that extended well beyond the exhibition halls.

Twenty years on, Meetings Africa has moved from introduction to influence. And as Africa looks to grow its share of the global business events market, the message from Johannesburg was unmistakable – the continent is ready to move from presence to power.

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AFRICA SHOWCASE: Taking African Tourism to the World, One Market at a Time



As global competition for tourism attention intensifies, Africa Showcase has emerged as one of the continent's most effective trade engagement platforms - quietly, deliberately, and with measurable results. In response to growing demand from both African suppliers and international buyers, Africa Showcase significantly expanded its global roadshow programme for 2026, reinforcing its position as a premium conduit

between African tourism products and the world's most influential source markets.

At its core, Africa Showcase is built around a simple but powerful idea: focused, results-driven trade engagements outperform scale-driven expos. Rather than asking African businesses to wait for buyers to come to the continent, Africa Showcase takes Africa directly to the buyer - on the buyer's terms, in their markets, and within their commercial realities.



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At its core, Africa Showcase is built around a simple but powerful idea: focused, results-driven trade engagements outperform scale-driven expos. Rather than asking African businesses to wait for buyers to come to the continent, Africa Showcase takes Africa directly to the buyer - on the buyer's terms, in their markets, and within their commercial realities.

African tourism businesses with high-quality international buyers.

Throughout 2025, the roadshow series - organised by On Show Solutions, an independent tourism event specialist with extensive international experience - delivered targeted, professionally curated engagements across key global markets. These included a Southern Europe Roadshow spanning Madrid, Paris, Milan and Rome in February; a South Africa Roadshow in June; a Mitteleuropa Roadshow across Zurich and Munich in September; and a major North

A Platform Designed for Outcomes, Not Optics

Africa Showcase's roadshows are curated environments where vetted African tourism suppliers meet pre-qualified, decision-making buyers. The format is intentionally structured: scheduled meetings, guided networking, access to in-market intelligence from local experts, and post-event reporting that allows exhibitors to track leads, conversions, and return on investment.

For buyers, the value proposition is equally compelling. Africa Showcase offers efficient access to diverse African destinations and products without the need for long-haul travel, the opportunity to negotiate trade rates directly, discover emerging destinations, and build long-term commercial relationships that support sustained business growth. In an era where time and relevance are increasingly scarce commodities, Africa Showcase delivers both.

A Landmark 2025 Sets the Stage

The expanded 2026 programme followed a landmark 2025, during which Africa Showcase consolidated its reputation as one of the most effective global platforms connecting

America Roadshow covering Atlanta, New York City, San Diego and Vancouver in November.

Each stop brought African suppliers face-to-face with carefully selected buyers, enabling direct business discussions, relationship-building and tangible commercial outcomes. Organisers attribute the success of the 2025 programme to Africa Showcase's market-specific approach, ensuring that each roadshow was tailored to the travel patterns, buyer behaviour and commercial expectations of its host region.

Going Global: The 2026 Roadshow Expansion

Building on this momentum, Africa Showcase entered 2026 with its most ambitious global footprint to date.

The expanded programme opened in the Middle East from January 25 - 29, followed by Southern Europe from February 9 - 13, before a strategic presence at ITB Berlin from March 3 - 5, the world's leading travel trade show. From there, the roadshow moved into Latin America from March 23 - 27, and will be at the Nordics from April 20 - 24, Australasia from July 20 - 31, Central Eastern Europe from September 21 - 25, and Mitteleuropa from September 28 - October 2.

The final quarter of the year will see Africa Showcase maintain its global visibility with participation at ITB Asia from October 21 - 23, ITB Americas from November 10 - 12, and a dedicated North America Roadshow from November 15 - 20.

Notably, the inclusion of the Middle East - covering markets such as Doha and Dubai - signals Africa Showcase's recognition of shifting outbound travel dynamics and the rising importance of new luxury, leisure and MICE source markets.

Relevance Over Scale

What differentiates Africa Showcase is its refusal to chase size for its own sake. Instead, the platform prioritises relevance, buyer quality and conversion potential. According to organisers, this focus enables exhibitors to turn conversations into contracts, while giving buyers a curated, time-efficient gateway into Africa's tourism offering.

Managed by industry professionals including Jacqui Reynolds, On Show Solutions has positioned Africa Showcase as a trusted intermediary - one that understands both African product realities and international buyer expectations. This balance is increasingly critical as Africa seeks to grow its share of global tourism in a more competitive and value-conscious marketplace.

Positioning Africa in the Global Trade Conversation

As Africa Showcase's expanded geographic reach underscores a broader ambition: to ensure African tourism is not peripheral to global trade discussions, but firmly embedded within them.

By taking African tourism products directly into key source markets - across Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, Asia and Australasia - Africa Showcase is redefining how the continent engages the global travel trade. It is a model built on precision rather than volume, partnerships rather than spectacle, and outcomes rather than promises.

For Africa Meets, Africa Showcase represents a new-generation trade platform - one that understands that Africa's tourism future will be shaped not just by destinations and products, but by how, where and with whom the continent chooses to do business



CAPE TOWN AND THE WESTERN CAPE:

Africa's Luxury & MICE

Powerhouse on the Global Stage

By Africa Meets Staff Writer

At a time when destinations worldwide are competing not just for visitors, but for influence, investment and ideas, Cape Town and the Western Cape have quietly positioned themselves at the intersection of luxury tourism, high-value business events and long-term economic impact. The result is a destination that is no longer simply hosting events, but shaping global conversations – and doing so on Africa's terms.

At the centre of this strategy is Wesgro, the official tourism, trade and investment promotion agency for the Western Cape. Through a tightly integrated approach that aligns leisure travel, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE), Wesgro is driving a value-led growth model designed to deliver jobs, investment and inclusive economic returns.



Luxury as an Economic Strategy

Luxury tourism plays a strategic role in the Western Cape's broader development ambitions. While long-haul international arrivals account for less than a quarter of South Africa's total visitor numbers, they generate more than half of total tourism spend. This disproportionate impact makes luxury and premium travel central to sustainable growth.

The Western Cape's appeal lies not in a single icon, but in its extraordinary diversity within proximity. From a globally connected city to dramatic coastlines, celebrated winelands, mountain ranges and semi-desert landscapes, the destination delivers layered experiences without logistical complexity. For luxury travellers and incentive planners, this translates into variety, exclusivity and ease.

"Luxury today is about depth, authenticity and emotional connection," Brueton notes. "What differentiates the Western Cape is that visitors can experience world-class accommodation and service while still feeling a strong sense of place, culture and community."

This balance between global standards and local relevance is reinforced through storytelling initiatives such as Wesgro's *With Love from the Locals* campaign, which puts real people and lived experiences at the centre of the destination narrative.

Where Luxury Meets MICE

Few destinations globally manage to integrate luxury tourism and MICE as seamlessly as Cape Town and the Western Cape. Here, globally competitive convention infrastructure coexists with vineyards, coastal reserves and private estates capable of hosting exclusive, high-end events.

This convergence is not accidental. The Cape Town & Western Cape Convention Bureau, powered by Wesgro, has spent over a decade building credibility in the international meetings market. Cape Town's consistent ranking as Africa's leading convention city reflects sustained investment in infrastructure, skills and bid competitiveness.

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Our focus is not volume for volume's sake," says Russel Brueton, Chief Marketing & Innovation Officer at Wesgro. "Luxury tourism and business events allow us to attract travellers and delegates who stay longer, spend more, and engage more deeply with the destination. That is how tourism becomes a real economic engine.

“MICE is not just about filling venues,” says Brueton. “It is about connecting tourism to knowledge exchange, innovation and sector development. Conferences and exhibitions bring global expertise into our economy, stimulate collaboration, and leave legacies that extend far beyond the event itself.”

At the premium end of the market, incentive travel has emerged as a powerful catalyst. Incentives activate a wide ecosystem – from luxury hotels and exclusive venues to chefs, creatives, transport operators and regional experiences. Importantly, they also push demand beyond the city into secondary and rural areas, spreading economic benefits more evenly across the province.

Trade Events as Global Anchors

Cape Town’s position on the global MICE map is reinforced by a portfolio of major international exhibitions that return year after year. Flagship events such as Mining Indaba, WTM Africa and Africa Tech Week have become permanent fixtures in the global calendar, drawing decision-makers,



investors and thought leaders from across the world.

These exhibitions do more than generate immediate visitor spend. They anchor Cape Town’s reputation as a serious business destination, facilitate trade and investment, and position Africa as an accessible, opportunity-rich market.

“Exhibitions give us continuity and visibility,” Brueton explains. “They ensure Cape Town remains front of mind globally, while also serving as gateways into Africa’s key growth sectors.”

Infrastructure, Access and Growth

The Western Cape’s rise as a luxury and MICE destination



has been underpinned by continued investment in infrastructure. Improved air access, an expanding portfolio of premium accommodation, and world-class conferencing facilities have all contributed to growth. Looking ahead, an anticipated increase in hotel inventory and ongoing route development are expected to further strengthen the destination’s competitive position.

Wesgro’s five-year strategy (FY26–FY30) reflects this ambition. Targets include securing over 160 business event bids with an estimated economic value of R4.5 billion (≈ \$320 million), attracting up to one million additional international visitors, unlocking new air routes, and expanding international marketing campaigns into high-growth markets such as China.

“To remain competitive, we must grow demand while strengthening supply,” says Brueton. “That means investing in access, improving mobility, and continuously evolving our



destination brand to reach new audiences.”

Sustainability and Long-Term Legacy

Sustainability is no longer optional in luxury travel or business events – and the Western Cape is embedding it as a core design principle. In the business events space, legacy outcomes are increasingly decisive in winning bids, particularly for association conferences.

Wesgro works closely with partners to ensure sustainability commitments are practical, measurable and credible. From supplier development and paperless systems to inclusive procurement and skills development, the goal is to ensure that growth delivers long-term value.

“Luxury and MICE create skilled jobs and open doors for SMMEs,” Brueton says. “They support chefs, technicians, creatives, guides and entrepreneurs. When done right, these sectors drive inclusion and resilience.”

Africa, the Gateway and the Future

Africa’s rapid economic and

population growth is reshaping global travel and trade flows. As sectors such as mining, energy, healthcare, finance and technology expand across the continent, demand for convening platforms is growing in parallel.

Cape Town is uniquely positioned to serve this need. With strong connectivity to key African markets and established global links to Europe, North America and Asia, the city functions as both gateway and benchmark for Africa’s luxury and MICE proposition.

“Our role is to show what is possible,” Brueton reflects. “World-class delivery, authentic experiences, strong sector depth – this is how Africa competes and wins at the highest level.”

As the global luxury and business events landscape continues to evolve, Cape Town and the Western Cape are no longer simply participants. They are shaping the narrative – positioning Africa as a destination not just to visit, but to invest in, collaborate with, and return to.

Africa’s hub for business, innovation and world-class experiences is already here

CEO Breakout Sidebar



In Focus: Wrenelle Stander Chief Executive Officer, Wesgro

As Chief Executive Officer of Wesgro, Wrenelle Stander leads the Western Cape’s integrated tourism, trade and investment strategy at a time when destinations are being judged not only on appeal, but on impact.

Under her leadership, Wesgro has sharpened its focus on high-value tourism and business events, positioning Cape Town and the Western Cape as a destination where luxury, knowledge exchange and economic development intersect. Central to this approach is a value-led growth model that prioritises longer stays, higher spend, sector alignment and inclusive outcomes.

Stander has been instrumental in advancing the province’s MICE competitiveness, reinforcing Cape Town’s standing as Africa’s leading convention destination while ensuring that conferences, exhibitions and incentives contribute meaningfully to investment, skills development and innovation.

Her vision is clear: to evolve the Western Cape from a world-class host destination into Africa’s premier hub for business, ideas and global connection, while preserving the authenticity, culture and natural assets that define its luxury appeal.

East Africa's Tourism Trade Show Circuit: The Platforms Defining the Region's Leisure, Luxury and MICE Future

East Africa has emerged as one of Africa's most structured and strategically layered tourism trade show regions. Rather than competing in isolation, its major expos now form a complementary **trade show circuit**, each playing a distinct role in destination marketing, buyer engagement, product

development and investment promotion. Collectively, these platforms are shaping how the region presents itself to global leisure, luxury and MICE markets.

At the top of the regional hierarchy sits the Magical Kenya Travel Expo (MKTE), the largest and most internationally oriented tourism trade show

in East Africa. MKTE 2026 is scheduled for 2–4 October 2026 at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC) in Nairobi (for the first time in three years after it moved to the Uhuru Gardens), reinforcing Kenya's position as the region's primary aviation, conferencing and business hub.

The expo functions as a high-level B2B marketplace, connecting African tourism suppliers with hosted buyers from key global source markets. Its strength lies in scale, buyer quality and Kenya's ability to showcase a broad product mix — from wildlife and coastal tourism to conservation, luxury lodges and increasingly, MICE infrastructure. For many international buyers, MKTE is the first and most comprehensive entry point into East Africa.

Where MKTE delivers scale and visibility, Karibu-Kilifair provides depth. Hosted annually in Arusha, Tanzania's safari capital, Kilifair is firmly product-driven and experiential

in tone. It is particularly strong in safari, adventure and conservation tourism, attracting buyers who are closer to the operational end of the value chain.

Kilifair's positioning makes it a critical platform for showcasing Tanzania's northern circuit, cross-border itineraries, and high-end safari experiences, while also supporting smaller operators and DMCs seeking meaningful commercial engagement rather than volume exposure. This year's event will take place from 4-7 June 2026 at the Magereza Ground, Arusha.

Uganda's Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo (POATE) has evolved rapidly into one of the most purposeful shows on the circuit. POATE 2026 will take place from 21–23 May 2026 at Speke Resort Munyonyo, Kampala, under the theme *Wanderlust*. Organised by the Uganda Tourism Board, POATE operates across both B2B and B2C formats, bringing together hosted buyers, exhibitors, media and consumers. Now entering

its 10th edition, the expo is central to Uganda's strategy to reposition itself as a destination for sustainable, inclusive and community-led tourism. Its emphasis on storytelling, culture and conservation distinguishes POATE from more transactional trade shows, while its growing international buyer programme signals Uganda's increasing confidence on the global tourism stage.

Completing the mainland circuit is the Swahili International Tourism Expo (S!TE), Tanzania's national travel trade showcase organised by the Tanzania Tourist Board. Typically held in Dar es Salaam in October, S!TE plays a crucial role in convening regional and international tourism stakeholders, with a strong focus on sustainability, conservation and destination promotion. The expo attracts tour operators, travel agents, hotels and tourism boards, while highlighting Tanzania's flagship attractions such as the Serengeti, Mount Kilimanjaro and Zanzibar. Beyond exhibitions, S!TE integrates conference sessions and cultural programming, reinforcing Tanzania's positioning as both a tourism powerhouse and a cultural destination.

What makes East Africa's trade show landscape compelling is how these platforms work together as a journey. Buyers often attend MKTE for regional overview and strategic meetings, Kilifair for safari and experiential sourcing, POATE for emerging product discovery and community-based tourism, and S!TE for national-level engagement

and coastal extensions. This sequencing allows East Africa to present itself not as a single destination, but as a connected tourism ecosystem capable of supporting multi-country itineraries, luxury circuits and incentive travel programmes.

From a MICE perspective, the circuit reflects growing maturity. Nairobi's convention infrastructure anchors large-scale meetings and exhibitions; Kampala and Dar es Salaam provide secondary hubs with resort-style conferencing; while Arusha and Zanzibar deliver high-impact pre- and post-event experiences. For incentive planners, this diversity within proximity is a powerful proposition.

As Africa competes for global tourism attention, East Africa's trade show circuit demonstrates how coordinated platforms — rather than fragmented efforts — can drive destination visibility, commercial outcomes and long-term brand equity. For **Africa Meets**, these expos represent where East Africa defines its tourism future: confidently regional, globally competitive, and increasingly premium in ambition.



A Continent at the Crossroads

– Africa’s Quiet Fight to Change the Meetings Map



[Africa holds just three per cent of the global meetings market, per ICCA’s 2024 report. As competition intensifies and expectations rise, the continent faces a defining moment – remain peripheral, or organise deliberately for influence, scale and relevance.]



Africa’s meetings industry stands at an inflection point.

On one hand, the numbers are stark. According to the 2024 GlobeWatch Rankings by the **International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)**, Africa accounted for just 380 international association meetings last year – roughly three per cent of the global total. Europe dominated. Asia-Pacific accelerated. Latin America continued its steady climb.

On the other hand, beneath those numbers is a quieter but more consequential shift – a growing cohort of African destinations, institutions and industry leaders deliberately reshaping how, why and where meetings

are hosted on the continent. Not chasing volume for its own sake, but repositioning MICE as an economic, policy and influence tool.

Africa is not yet winning the numbers game, but it is beginning to understand the strategy and how to go about getting there.

Three Percent Is Not a Statistic – It Is a Signal

There is no escaping the reality that Africa’s current share of the global meetings economy is inadequate. For a continent of 54 countries, over 1.5 billion people and rising geopolitical relevance in many sectors, three per cent reflects structural weakness – fragmented planning, uneven infrastructure, inconsistent

air access and, in many markets, the failure to recognise MICE as a standalone economic sector.

Meetings are not simply a tourism activity. They shape standards, build professional networks, influence policy and attract investment. Being absent from these rooms limits Africa’s ability to shape global conversations that directly affect its development trajectory.

Acknowledging this is not pessimism; it is strategic honesty and a desire to work on it to win.

The Destinations Carrying the Continent

If Africa has avoided complete marginalisation, it is because a handful of destinations have shouldered disproportionate responsibility.

South Africa remains the continent’s anchor, with 98 ICCA-recorded meetings. Its strength lies not in novelty, but in institutional depth and delivery consistency. Cities such as Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg continue to demonstrate Africa’s capacity to host complex, large-scale global congresses.

South Africa’s role is not to dominate Africa’s MICE narrative – but to stabilise it.

Alongside it, Morocco, Kenya and Egypt provide regional balance, leveraging culture, diplomacy, development institutions and connectivity to attract meetings aligned with their national strengths.

Yet even collectively, these destinations cannot lift Africa’s share alone.

Rwanda and the Power of Intent

Perhaps the most instructive African MICE story of the past decade is Rwanda.

With 31 ICCA-recorded meetings, Rwanda is not competing on scale. It is competing on clarity. By positioning MICE as a national development instrument – embedded in policy, backed by the state and executed with precision – Rwanda has reframed what success looks like for emerging destinations.

That confidence was underscored by ICCA’s decision to award Rwanda hosting rights for the ICCA Congress 2027 – a first for the country and a strong vote of confidence in both Kigali’s capabilities and Africa’s readiness to host the global meetings community.

It is a symbolic and practical milestone: Africa is not just attending the global

conversation – it is beginning to host it.

Why Africa’s Meetings Look Different

Africa’s meetings ecosystem is structurally different from mature markets. Globally, over half of international association meetings fall within the 150 to 999 delegate range – a segment where Africa is particularly well suited. These meetings are often tied to healthcare, agriculture, energy, education and technology – sectors central to African development agendas.

This alignment gives Africa’s meetings outsized developmental impact.

But impact alone does not translate into market share. Visibility, consistency and coordinated promotion still matter.

The Case for Collaboration

One of the clearest messages emerging from industry leadership is that Africa’s fragmentation is its greatest weakness.

Glenton de Kock, CEO of the South African Association for the Conference Industry, argues that Africa’s future growth depends on moving beyond isolated national efforts.

“Meetings are about relationships and collaboration,” de Kock notes. “Africa cannot grow its global share if destinations operate in silos. We need alignment between government, industry and regions – not competition that weakens our collective value proposition,” he told Africa Meets at the just-ended Meetings Africa event in Johannesburg.

For de Kock, MICE must be treated as an economic sector with measurable socio-economic





impact, not a tourism sub-category. That shift, he argues, is what will allow Africa to scale sustainably.

ICCA COE's View: Africa's Moment Is Emerging

From ICCA's perspective, Africa's challenge is not relevance – it is readiness at scale. Speaking during Meetings Africa, Senthil Gopinath, CEO of ICCA, emphasised that Africa's meetings profile is evolving.

“Africa's meetings are increasingly aligned with global priority sectors,” he noted. “What is important now is building consistency – in bidding, in data, in skills and in collaboration. The potential is clear, but growth must be deliberate.”

ICCA's expanding skills programmes across the continent, including in Kigali, signal a longer-term commitment to building African capacity rather than simply counting African events.

Buyer demand shaping Africa's growth

To emphasise the growing understanding of the strategic importance of MICE to their economies, Alex Donaldson, Head of Sales – Asia and Africa at IMEX Group, says Africa's growing presence at IMEX Frankfurt, one of the leading meetings events on the

calendar, is being driven by demand rather than sentiment.

“We do a lot of analysis around the show,” she explained. “What we see very clearly is strong and growing interest from buyers in Africa as a destination. That demand is encouraging more African partners to take part.”

While South Africa remains the continent's largest exhibitor, Donaldson emphasised that many destinations attend with smaller, focused delegations.

“For some destinations, it's not about size,” she said. “It's about coming with clear objectives, meeting the right buyers and using the platform effectively.”

From Participation to Influence

It is obvious from the foregoing that Africa's meetings industry is no longer at the awareness stage. The question now is whether it can transition from participation to influence.

That will require:

- Stronger and better-funded national convention bureaux
- Regional bidding strategies and shared aviation planning



- Skills development across destinations and organisers
- Government recognition of MICE as an economic catalyst

Without these shifts, Africa risks remaining visible but marginal.

A Quiet Fight, A Defining Moment

Africa's three per cent share of the global meetings market, per the ICCA GlobeWatch report of 2024, is a reality that cannot be softened. But it is also not immutable.

The rankings show who is carrying the continent today. Rwanda 2027 signals growing global confidence. The work of industry leaders, associations and destinations points to a continent slowly organising itself for relevance.

Africa's future meetings will not be won loudly. It will be won deliberately. We shall see if there is any improvement in the individual destinations' performance and if Africa has improved on the three per cent share when the 2025 report is released at IMEX in May 2026.

Meetings Africa 2026 closes on a high, Celebrating 20 Years of Purposeful African Connections

The 20th edition of Meetings Africa drew to a close in Johannesburg on Wednesday 25th February, 2026, marking not only a milestone anniversary but a clear statement of intent about Africa's growing stature in the global business events industry.

Hosted at the Sandton Convention Centre, Meetings Africa 2026 unfolded over three impactful days – from the thought leadership-driven BONDday to two days of intensive trade, engagement and networking. Under the theme 20 Years of Connecting Africa to the World, the event reflected both how far the platform has come and where it is headed next.

From foundations to lasting value

Reflecting on the show's early years, Miller Matola, CEO of Millvest Advisory, said the real legacy of Meetings Africa has always been the relationships it nurtured.

“Twenty years ago, when Meetings Africa was starting out, one of the greatest



things was the networks and relationships that were built, which in years to come translated into big business for South Africa,” he said. “Today, we are reaping the benefits of those early efforts. What I always remember are the connections – the people and the relationships – which have endured even up to now. That is what this industry is all about.”

Matola added that the growth of the MICE sector across South Africa and the continent has been both visible and gratifying, underscoring Meetings Africa's role as a catalyst rather than just a marketplace.

A platform refined by structure and scale

For Nomasonto Ndlovu CEO of Beacon Africa Tourism and

former Acting CEO of South African Tourism and, Meetings Africa has been a constant presence throughout her professional journey in business events.

“I was involved in the early conceptualisation stages of Meetings Africa, and it has remained a constant in my career,” she noted. “The development of the buyer selection model and the match-making diary system was a standout moment. That structured approach to curated appointments fundamentally strengthened the value proposition of the show.”

Her comments echoed a sentiment shared by many exhibitors and buyers at this year’s event: that Meetings Africa’s strength lies not only in its numbers, but in the quality and intentionality of its engagements.

Economic impact and confidence from leadership

Opening the trade floor, South Africa’s Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, placed strong emphasis on the measurable economic impact of Meetings Africa.

“Over the past three years alone, the economic impact of Meetings Africa on our GDP has nearly doubled – from R371 million in 2023 to R690 million in 2025,” she said. “During this period, the show has created and sustained more than 2,600 jobs.”

She also highlighted the scale of participation at the 2026 edition, noting that buyers from 53 countries were in attendance, alongside 375 hosted buyers, 325 exhibitors and more than 6,400 confirmed business meetings. “Each meeting represents a connection, each connection

represents possibility, and each possibility represents progress,” she told delegates.

Africa’s growing voice in global business events

The continent’s growing influence was further reinforced by Senthil Gopinath, CEO of ICCA, who praised the momentum he continues to see across African destinations.

“Africa is not just growing in numbers; it is growing in confidence, capability and purpose,” he said. “Platforms like Meetings Africa are critical in nurturing new destinations, developing skills and taking Africa’s business events message to the rest of the world.”

A diverse exhibitor showcase from across the continent

A defining feature of Meetings Africa 2026 was the strength and diversity of its exhibitor line-up. The event featured more than 300 exhibitors from over 20 African countries representing a wide cross-section of the meetings ecosystem — from national and regional convention bureaux, hotel groups and destination marketing organisations, to professional conference organisers (PCOs), function venues, airlines and specialist service providers.

South Africa’s own tourism and meetings infrastructure was prominently showcased alongside emerging MICE markets from across the continent. Exhibitors included established destination authorities and convention partners promoting their



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Over the past three years alone, the economic impact of Meetings Africa on our GDP has nearly doubled – from R371 million in 2023 to R690 million in 2025. During this period, the show has created and sustained more than 2,600 jobs.

confencing facilities and service capabilities, alongside niche providers offering everything from destination logistics to event technology and specialised event services. The broad range of exhibitor categories — from accommodation with conference facilities and destination management companies, to industry associations and media partners — emphasised not just participation, but the depth of Africa’s business events value chain.

Buyers and delegates on the trade floor noted the quality and relevance of the exhibitions, with many highlighting the importance of face-to-face introductions and curated appointment systems in unlocking real business outcomes. For many African partners, Meetings Africa remains one of the few forums

where suppliers can present their products, capabilities and strategic propositions to a decision-ready international and regional audience in a single, structured environment.

Beyond the exhibition floor

Across the two trade days, the exhibition floor was alive with meetings, presentations and exchanges between destinations, buyers, associations and service providers. Emerging destinations showcased readiness alongside established players, while discussions increasingly centred on legacy, sustainability and long-term partnerships.

The networking cocktail that closed the first trade day offered a fitting reflection of the show’s ethos – relaxed,

inclusive and relationship-driven – reminding delegates that business events are built as much on trust as they are on transactions.

As Meetings Africa 2026 concludes, the 20th anniversary edition stands as a testament to what deliberate planning, collaboration and consistency can achieve. More importantly, it signals a future in which Africa is not merely participating in global business events, but confidently shaping them.



Sunbird Hotels & Resorts Positions Malawi for MICE Growth at Meetings Africa 2026

Africa's meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) sector continues to gain momentum, and Meetings Africa 2026 once again underlined why the continent is increasingly being taken seriously as a global business events destination.

Organised by South African Tourism, Meetings Africa has grown over two decades into the continent's leading MICE trade platform, connecting African suppliers with international buyers, investors and decision-makers. This year's edition brought together more than 300 exhibitors from over 20 African countries, alongside hundreds of hosted buyers and thousands of structured business meetings, reinforcing its role as a catalyst for trade, partnerships and long-term sector growth.

Sunbird's Strategic Play at Meetings Africa

For Malawi's Sunbird Hotels & Resorts, Meetings Africa 2026 delivered both visibility and concrete business opportunity. According to Temwa Mhango-Kanjadza, Head of Sales, Marketing and Distribution, the group's participation was driven by a clear commercial and positioning strategy.

"Our experience at Meetings Africa has been very positive," she said. "We came here to unlock new leads, close business deals and create awareness around new products we have recently launched."

The show provided a timely platform to engage with buyers actively seeking new and emerging African destinations that can combine professional meeting infrastructure with distinctive leisure and cultural experiences.

Strengthening Malawi's Conference Infrastructure

At the heart of Sunbird's MICE proposition is the newly launched

Sunbird Livingstonia Conference Centre, located in Salima on the shores of Lake Malawi, approximately 100 kilometres from the capital.

Purpose-built to serve large conferences and regional summits, the facility can host up to 1,500 delegates, with a main plenary hall accommodating about 1,000 participants, supported by flexible breakaway rooms and dedicated catering facilities.

Sunbird operates nine hotels and resorts across Malawi, covering city, lakeside and airport locations. These include key business hotels in Lilongwe and Blantyre, as well as leisure-focused resorts that are increasingly attractive to incentive groups and conferences seeking a balance between work and relaxation.

Investing Ahead of Demand

To support growing demand, Sunbird is expanding its accommodation inventory in Salima. Sixty additional rooms are being added at Sunbird Livingstonia Beach, increasing capacity at the Livingstonia complex to around 156 rooms. Plans are also underway to expand Sunbird Waterfront from 46 to 100 rooms, positioning it as a standalone resort capable of supporting large-scale conferences and events.

"These investments are about future-proofing our offering," Mhango-Kanjadza explained. "We want to ensure that our accommodation, meeting facilities and guest experiences meet the expectations of modern conference delegates."

Collaboration and the Continental Opportunity

Africa currently accounts for an estimated 3 percent of the global business events market, yet industry leaders believe this figure could grow significantly



with improved connectivity, infrastructure and collaboration. Meetings Africa 2026 reflected that optimism, with growing buyer interest in African destinations beyond traditional hubs.

"As African countries, we need to collaborate more," Mhango-Kanjadza said. "For major international conferences, neighbouring countries like Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe can work together on bids. Distance by air is not a barrier, and collaboration strengthens our competitiveness."

Experience as a Differentiator

Beyond infrastructure, Mhango-Kanjadza highlighted the rising importance of experience in MICE decision-making.

"Delegates are looking for more than meeting rooms," she noted. "They want authentic experiences that reflect who we are as destinations. That is where Malawi has a real advantage."

As Meetings Africa 2026 demonstrated, Africa's MICE narrative is evolving from potential to performance. With sustained investment, regional cooperation and platforms that facilitate meaningful connections, the continent is steadily positioning itself as a credible and competitive business events destination – and Sunbird Hotels & Resorts is ensuring that Malawi is firmly part of that conversation.

Zuri Events' Kezy Mukiri Urges Continental Cooperation as Africa Targets 10% of Global MICE Market

By Francis Doku, Johannesburg

As Africa's premier business events trade show, Meetings Africa, continues to shape conversations on the future of the continent's meetings industry, a recurring theme has emerged with growing clarity: Africa's next phase of MICE growth will depend on collaboration rather than competition.

That message was powerfully articulated in Johannesburg by Kezy Mukiri, Chief Executive Officer of Zuri Events, who called on African destinations, organisers and policymakers to work together to significantly increase the continent's share of the global business events market.

Currently accounting for an estimated 3% of global business events, Africa, Mukiri argued, has the infrastructure, talent and ambition to grow that figure to at least 10% by 2035 – but only if stakeholders adopt a more coordinated, continent-wide approach.

"Africa has proven capacity," she said on the sidelines of Meetings Africa. "What we now need is alignment—between destinations, governments, private sector players and investors—to position Africa as a unified, competitive MICE destination."

Demonstrating Africa's delivery capability

Mukiri's call for cooperation is grounded in experience. Zuri Events recently served as organisers of the Global Tourism Resilience Conference in Nairobi, a high-level international forum that attracted ministers, global

institutions and industry leaders.

"That conference was a strong signal," she noted. "It showed that African event organisers can deliver complex, high-level international conferences with efficiency, confidence and global standards."

She stressed that such events should not be viewed as isolated national successes, but as collective proof points for Africa's readiness to host major global meetings.

"When Kenya succeeds, when Rwanda succeeds, when South Africa succeeds, it strengthens Africa's credibility as a whole," Mukiri said.

Meetings Africa as a catalyst for continental alignment

Held at the Sandton Convention Centre, Meetings Africa 2026 convened more than 300 exhibitors from over 20 African countries, alongside international buyers seeking new destinations and partners.

For Mukiri, the value of Meetings Africa lies not only in deal-making, but in its role as a connector.

"This is where Africa's MICE ecosystem meets itself," she said. "Destinations, organisers, convention bureaus, venues and buyers are in one room, having honest conversations about what it will take to grow."

She added that Africa's fragmented approach to bidding and promotion remains one of its biggest limitations.

"We cannot keep operating as isolated markets," she said. "Global buyers want scale, confidence and consistency—and that comes from collaboration."

Africa MICE Summit: building the ecosystem intentionally

Mukiri also used her engagement at Meetings Africa to spotlight the Africa MICE Summit, which is organised by Zuri Events and has been running since 2018 as a dedicated learning and networking platform for the continent's business events industry.

"The Africa MICE Summit was created to connect Africa's MICE industry intentionally," she explained. "It's about building skills, sharing knowledge and preparing the industry for the scale of opportunities we are targeting."

The Africa MICE Summit 2026, scheduled for 9–11 September 2026, will bring together over 500 attendees, including MICE professionals, trade associations, conference organisers, MICE technology experts, tourism boards, investors, venues and operators from across Africa and beyond.

With 25+ speakers and 50+ exhibitors, the summit will focus on shaping the future of Africa's business events sector through three core pillars: sustainability, innovation and people development.

"We bring academia, policymakers and industry together in one space," Mukiri said. "If we are serious about growing Africa's MICE share, we must invest in skills, curriculum development, certification and innovation—especially homegrown event technology."

From 3% to 10%: a continental ambition

Mukiri believes Africa's youthful population, expanding infrastructure and growing political support for business events provide a strong foundation for accelerated growth.

"What's missing is not capacity—it's coordination," she said. "If Africa can align its efforts, share intelligence and jointly position itself, moving from 3% to 10% of the global business events market is achievable."

As Meetings Africa 2026 continues to reinforce South Africa's role as a continental convening hub, Mukiri's intervention added to a growing consensus on the exhibition floor: Africa's MICE future will be defined not by isolated successes, but by how deliberately the continent works together to compete on the global stage.



ILTM Africa and the Repositioning of Africa on the Global Luxury Map

Africa Meets speaks with Penny Fraser, Luxury Travel Specialist, and Olivia Gradidge, Marketing Manager, ILTM Africa, on how the continent has redefined luxury, the evolution of buyer demand, and why Africa's story now resonates globally.

Africa Meets: What was the original vision behind ILTM Africa, and how has that vision evolved since the event's inception?

Penny Fraser:

ILTM Africa was conceived as a platform where leaders in the African and UAE luxury travel markets could reconnect, build meaningful relationships, and grow their businesses through carefully facilitated conversations between the world's best luxury agents and experience providers.

Over time, the vision has evolved. We recognised a growing need to move beyond transactional meetings towards deeper engagement around conservation, community impact, and what luxury truly means to today's high-net-worth traveller. These conversations now sit at the heart of ILTM Africa.



Olivia Gradidge

Africa Meets: Looking back, what have been the most significant milestones in ILTM Africa's growth?

Penny Fraser:

The pandemic was a defining moment. It reshaped global travel priorities and reinforced the value of time, space, family, and emotional connection.



Penny Fraser

Luxury travellers began seeking immersive, meaningful experiences that create lasting memories and leave destinations better than they were found.

For ILTM Africa, this prompted a shift in format and intent. The focus became less about showcasing products and more



about enabling conversations on how the industry can do better — for travellers, communities, and destinations.

Africa Meets: How has ILTM Africa adapted to changes in the global luxury travel market, particularly in Africa's positioning?

Olivia Gradidge:

Being part of a global ILTM brand has significantly elevated Africa's visibility as a luxury destination. ILTM Africa has helped reposition the continent by highlighting its diversity, authenticity, and depth of experience.

The event has adapted by reframing Africa's narrative — emphasising sustainability, strengthening local partnerships, and showcasing conservation and community initiatives. Through technology, content, and storytelling, ILTM Africa connects Africa's luxury offering to the world in a way

that feels contemporary and relevant.

Africa Meets: How has ILTM Africa contributed to reshaping global perceptions of Africa as a luxury destination?

Olivia Gradidge:

ILTM Africa has played a pivotal role in challenging outdated perceptions. By curating high-quality exhibitors and facilitating insightful discussions through our "In Conversation With" series, we highlight innovation, excellence, and leadership within Africa's luxury travel sector.

Our evolving media strategy amplifies these stories globally, reinforcing Africa's position as a vital and competitive luxury market rather than a niche or emerging one.

Africa Meets: What differentiates Africa's luxury offering today compared

to when ILTM Africa first launched?

Penny Fraser:

The core goal has always remained the same — to showcase Africa as a destination capable of competing globally in the luxury space. What has changed is the depth and sophistication of that offering.

ILTM Africa now places strong emphasis on education, partnerships, and thought leadership. Initiatives such as the annual State of the Industry Report, expanded experiential programming, and the move to the Norval Foundation venue have elevated both scale and quality, cementing ILTM Africa's position as a key industry platform.

Africa Meets: Which destinations or product categories have seen the most notable growth through ILTM Africa?

Penny Fraser:

Experiential travel has grown significantly. In terms of destinations, we have seen strong momentum from St Helena, Egypt, Namibia, and Tanzania.

More broadly, notable growth has come from:





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ILTM Africa has played a pivotal role in challenging outdated perceptions. By curating high-quality exhibitors and facilitating insightful discussions through our “In Conversation With” series, we highlight innovation, excellence, and leadership within Africa’s luxury travel sector

- South Africa – luxury hotels, private reserves, wine estates and curated experiences
- Botswana – high-end safari supply
- Namibia – DMGs and desert lodge operators
- Mozambique – island and marine-focused luxury lodges
- East Africa (Kenya and Tanzania) – established safari and inbound operator markets

Africa Meets: How have buyer profiles and source markets evolved over time?

Olivia Gradidge: Buyer profiles have become more discerning and experience-led. There is increased interest from emerging markets such as Poland, Scandinavia and the CIS region, alongside continued demand from traditional luxury markets.

This evolution reflects a growing appetite for Africa’s distinct form of luxury — rooted in authenticity, sustainability, and emotional connection.

Africa Meets: How does ILTM Africa ensure suppliers engage with the right buyers?

Olivia Gradidge: ILTM Africa employs a rigorous buyer qualification process aligned to exhibitor needs. This includes:

- Invitation-only buyer participation
- Pre-scheduled one-to-one appointments
- Advanced matchmaking technology via ConnectMe
- Mandatory diary commitments
- Curated networking experiences
- Post-event insights and performance data

This structure ensures meaningful engagement and consistent return on investment for exhibitors.

Africa Meets: How has ILTM Africa influenced quality standards and product development among African luxury suppliers?



Penny Fraser: By setting high benchmarks through vetting, education, and curation, ILTM Africa has encouraged suppliers to align with global best practices in service excellence, sustainability, and authenticity.

Educational sessions, peer learning, and post-event feedback loops have played a key role in driving continuous improvement across the luxury travel value chain.

Africa Meets: How important is storytelling in shaping Africa’s luxury narrative?

Olivia Gradidge: Storytelling is fundamental. It allows Africa to move away from Eurocentric definitions of luxury towards narratives rooted in heritage, craftsmanship, and authenticity.

ILTM Africa curates this story carefully — from branding and marketing to immersive experiences. The launch of the ILTM Africa fragrance, created in partnership with Cape Island, is a tangible example of how the event expresses its evolving identity through sensory storytelling.

Africa Meets: What role do partnerships play in strengthening ILTM Africa’s impact?

Penny Fraser: Partnerships are central to everything we do. Collaboration between tourism boards, private sector players, and destination partners enriches the event experience and ensures relevance.

These alliances allow ILTM Africa to deliver immersive, innovative experiences that resonate with a global luxury audience while remaining



rooted in local authenticity.

Africa Meets: What is ILTM Africa’s vision for the next phase of Africa’s luxury journey?

Olivia Gradidge: The focus is on enhancing value — for exhibitors, buyers, and partners. ILTM Africa aims to build on what works while continuing to innovate through education, technology, and deeper engagement.

Remaining aligned with the global ILTM brand, the event will continue to support business growth, meaningful connections, and thought leadership across Africa’s luxury travel ecosystem.

Africa Meets: How do you see Africa’s role evolving within the global luxury travel ecosystem?

Penny Fraser: Africa is redefining luxury on its own terms through what can be described as “barefoot luxury” — deeply

authentic, immersive, and rooted in place.

As investment in high-end infrastructure grows alongside a strong commitment to sustainability and preservation, Africa’s value as an exclusive, low-density luxury destination will only increase. The challenge — and opportunity — lies in balancing growth with protection of what makes Africa unique.

Africa Meets: In one sentence, how would you describe ILTM Africa’s contribution to Africa’s luxury story?

Penny Fraser: The show where heritage and culture meet high-end travel — and every journey restores the land it treads.



Knowledge Before Concrete: Gilbert Abeiku Aggrey's Vision for Ghana at Meetings Africa 2026



The conversation has grown on how to have a harmonised system. Travelling within the West African region is often more expensive than travelling outside it. We need to tackle the readiness of our people about MICE as well as these costs before we focus solely on infrastructure.

As the landmark 20th edition of Meetings Africa drew to a close at the Sandton Convention Centre this week, the spotlight turned toward West Africa's burgeoning role in the global business events landscape. Amidst high-level trade and networking, Gilbert Abeiku Aggrey, Deputy CEO (Marketing and Special Duties) of the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), provided a candid assessment of the journey, offering a vision that prioritises intellectual capacity over mere physical infrastructure.

The 2026 edition of the show, themed 20 Years of Connecting Africa to the World, served as a backdrop for Mr Aggrey to highlight the strategic shift required to make Ghana a global powerhouse for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE).

A Strategic Presence at the Sandton Convention Centre

Led by Mr Aggrey, the Ghana Tourism Authority's delegation - which included Mr Johnny Arthur-Quarm, Director for Research, Monitoring and Evaluation, and a dedicated team from the MICE unit - engaged in three days of intensive trade and matchmaking. They were joined by key private sector partners including Alisa Hotel, Central Hotel, and Torchlight Tours, presenting a united front for Ghana's business tourism ecosystem.

For Mr Aggrey, participation in this premier trade show is a non-negotiable part of the country's growth. "It is impossible to get a share of the MICE market - whether in Africa or globally - without attending such powerful industry meetings," he noted. He observed that while Ghana often feels "lonely" as a primary MICE destination in its sub-region, the strategy is not to isolate. Instead, the GTA uses these platforms to sell the potential of West Africa as a whole, understanding that a stronger regional profile eventually flows back to benefit Ghana.



The "Knowledge First" Mandate

Perhaps his most striking reflection was a warning against the "build it and they will come" mentality. Mr Aggrey argued that the continent has seen enough underutilised infrastructure and that the future of the industry lies in understanding the business model before laying the bricks.

"It is important that we understand the business," Aggrey explained. "You don't build a sector when you don't know how the whole business model works. We need to study the model of this business - the meetings, the conventions, and the exhibitions - so that when our governments build the infrastructure, we will be able to run it."

He pointed out that several regions have historically invested in "huge structures" that failed to be sustained because the industry knowledge was not yet in place. To prevent this, Aggrey advocated for a "quadruple helix" of collaboration involving academia, the private sector, hospitality, and public

service agencies. By involving academia, he believes the industry can bridge the human resource gap, ensuring that training and capacity-building are aligned with market needs and international standards.

Connectivity and the "Expensive" Barrier

The conversation inevitably turned to the logistical hurdles facing the region. Despite Ghana's success in attracting major international airlines, the cost of intra-regional travel remains a significant deterrent.

"The conversation has grown on how to have a harmonised system," Aggrey admitted. "Travelling within the West African region is often more expensive than travelling outside it. We need to tackle the readiness of our people about MICE as well as these costs before we focus solely on infrastructure."

He stressed that even the most modern convention centre would fail if the tax regimes and air

connectivity didn't support the easy movement of delegates. For Aggrey, the goal is to ensure that the "destination Ghana" brand is synonymous not just with culture, but with efficiency and value.

A Legacy of Purpose

As South Africa's Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, celebrated the event's massive economic impact - creating over 2,600 jobs and contributing R690 million to the GDP - the blueprint for Ghana became clear.

For Gilbert Abeiku Aggrey, the takeaway from Meetings Africa 2026 is that the potential to solve unemployment and drive economic growth is within reach, provided the country does its "homework." By blending Ghana's cultural and heritage strengths with a sophisticated, knowledge-based approach to MICE, the nation is set to move beyond the pioneer phase and into a sustainable era of global leadership.

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M I C E

AFRICA MEETS • 001

North Africa's MICE Readiness – Quiet Scale, Strategic Advantage

As Africa's meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) industry continues to mature, North Africa is steadily consolidating its position as a credible, competitive and increasingly sophisticated business events region. Anchored by Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria, the sub-region blends proximity to Europe, cultural gravitas, improving infrastructure and strong value for money – attributes that are drawing growing interest from international associations, corporates and incentive planners.



While Africa as a whole still represents a modest share of the global meetings market, hosting just under 3 percent of recorded international association meetings worldwide, North Africa accounts for a meaningful and rising portion of that activity. According to the ICCA GlobeWatch rankings, Egypt and Morocco consistently rank among Africa's top five meeting destinations, with Egypt hosting close to 30 international association

meetings annually, Morocco just behind in the mid-20s, and Tunisia approaching 20 hosted meetings. These figures place North Africa firmly alongside East Africa's leading markets and ahead of many emerging destinations on the continent.

Morocco – The Region's MICE Flagship

Morocco has emerged as North Africa's most recognisable MICE brand. Cities such as Marrakech,

Casablanca and Rabat offer a rare mix of convention-grade infrastructure and experiential depth. Marrakech has positioned itself as a high-impact incentive and conference destination, where palace venues, luxury riads and desert extensions sit alongside modern congress facilities. Casablanca, meanwhile, plays a complementary role as a financial and commercial hub suited to large-scale conferences, exhibitions and trade events.



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Strong air connectivity to Europe, the Middle East and North America, combined with a growing portfolio of international hotel brands and specialist destination management companies, continues to underpin Morocco's competitiveness in both association and corporate segments.

Egypt – Scale, Connectivity and Global Gravitas

Egypt's strength lies in scale and visibility. Cairo remains one of Africa's most globally connected cities, supported by large convention venues capable of hosting high-volume congresses, summits and exhibitions. Its consistent presence at the top of Africa's ICCA rankings reflects long-standing institutional capacity and experience in hosting international meetings.

Beyond the capital, Egypt's incentive appeal is amplified by the Red Sea resorts, Nile cruises and world-renowned heritage assets, offering planners the ability to combine formal meetings with once-in-a-lifetime experiences. This dual appeal positions Egypt as both a serious business destination and a compelling incentive proposition.

Tunisia – Boutique MICE with Mediterranean Appeal

Tunisia occupies a more focused niche within the North African MICE landscape. While its total meeting volumes are lower than Morocco and Egypt, destinations such as Tunis, Hammamet and Sousse offer well-equipped mid-size venues, resort-based conference environments and a strong hospitality tradition.

Its Mediterranean location, compact geography and competitive pricing make Tunisia particularly attractive for executive retreats, association meetings and incentive programmes that prioritise intimacy, accessibility and cultural immersion over sheer scale.



Algeria – Latent Capacity, Emerging Opportunity

Algeria remains the most under-leveraged MICE market in North Africa. The country has invested in large conference facilities, modern hotels and air infrastructure, yet its meetings sector is constrained by visa complexity, limited destination marketing and weaker integration with international MICE networks.

That said, Algeria's economic weight, leadership in energy and infrastructure, and role in continental policy dialogue suggest long-term potential for specialised conferences and government-led summits as market access improves.

Why North Africa Works for MICE

The region's collective advantages are increasingly difficult to ignore. North Africa sits within a short flight radius of Europe and the Middle East, operates in compatible time zones, and offers a cost-efficient alternative to Southern European MICE hubs without sacrificing service standards or venue quality.

Equally important is narrative. From imperial palaces and ancient medinas to modern convention centres and coastal resorts, North Africa delivers a sense of place that enhances delegate engagement – a critical factor as business events and incentive programmes shift toward experience-led formats.

Sector-Led Events and Future Momentum

Major international trade and sector-focused events are reinforcing North Africa's MICE credibility. Technology, energy, tourism, healthcare, wellness and trade exhibitions continue to anchor global

attention, while incentive travel demand is rising as corporations seek destinations that combine inspiration with operational reliability.

The challenge ahead is coordination – aligning air access, visa facilitation, sustainability frameworks and regional branding to position North Africa not as isolated markets, but as a connected MICE corridor bridging Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

A Region Ready for the Next Phase

North Africa may not yet rival the world's largest meetings

destinations by volume, but its readiness is no longer in question. With Morocco's experiential leadership, Egypt's institutional scale, Tunisia's boutique strengths and Algeria's emerging capacity, the region is increasingly visible in the global meetings economy.

As Africa's MICE narrative evolves from potential to performance, North Africa is no longer waiting on the margins – it is quietly, strategically and confidently claiming its place on the global stage.



DATA SNAPSHOT — NORTH AFRICA MICE AT A GLANCE



ICCA International Association Meetings (2024, approximate)

- **Morocco** – ~26 meetings
- **Egypt** – ~28 meetings
- **Tunisia** – ~19 meetings
- **Algeria** – data emerging / lower volume

Source: International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) GlobeWatch report

Key Airports and Connectivity

- **Casablanca Mohammed V** – Direct links to 70+ global destinations
- **Cairo International** – High connectivity to Africa, Europe, Middle East, Asia
- **Tunis**–Carthage – Strong Mediterranean access
- **Houari Boumediene (Algiers)** – Growing connectivity, especially intra-Africa

Incentive Experience Assets

- **Morocco** – Sahara desert experiences, Atlas Mountain retreats, culinary workshops, heritage tours
- **Egypt** – Nile cruises, Red Sea resorts, archaeological excursions
- **Tunisia** – Mediterranean coastal activities, Roman heritage sites
- **Algeria** – Historical cities, Sahara fringe incentives, government/legal forums

Major Convention Venues

- **Morocco** – Palmeraie Convention Centre (Marrakech), Mohammed VI Exhibition Centre (Casablanca)
- **Egypt** – Egypt International Exhibition Centre; Cairo International Convention & Exhibition Centre
- **Tunisia** – Palais des Congrès (Tunis); Port El Kantaoui Conference Facilities
- **Algeria** – Palais des Expositions (Algiers)

Hotel Inventory & Event Capacity

- **Luxury hotel rooms (Morocco & Egypt)** – 20,000+ combined in core MICE cities
- **Large plenary space** – 5,000+ capacity venues in Marrakech and Cairo
- **Mid-tier event space** – 1,500–3,000 delegate capacity common in Tunis and Rabat

Regional Strength Indicators

- **Proximity to Europe** – ~3–6 hours flight time for most North African hubs
- **Time-zone advantage** – Shared or near-shared time zones with Europe and Middle East
- **Cost competitiveness** – Venue and accommodation rates often 15–40 % lower than Southern Europe equivalents

Emerging Trends (2026 Projection)

- **Sustainability** – Growing integration of eco-event practices, particularly in Morocco and Egypt
- **Luxury incentives** – Increased interest from Indian and Middle Eastern corporate planners
- **Intra-Africa MICE** – Expansion of African association meetings leveraging regional connectivity



Association Focus at IMEX Frankfurt sets the pace for a changing association landscape

With a strong emphasis on purpose-driven leadership, the transformative impact of AI and the evolving role of events in a rapidly-changing world, the program at Association Focus is set to meet association professionals' most pressing needs head on.

The dedicated day of learning, connection and strategic insight takes place on Monday, May 18 at Kap Europa—the day before IMEX Frankfurt May 19-21. It is organized in collaboration with ASAE and proudly sponsored by

Amsterdam Convention Bureau.

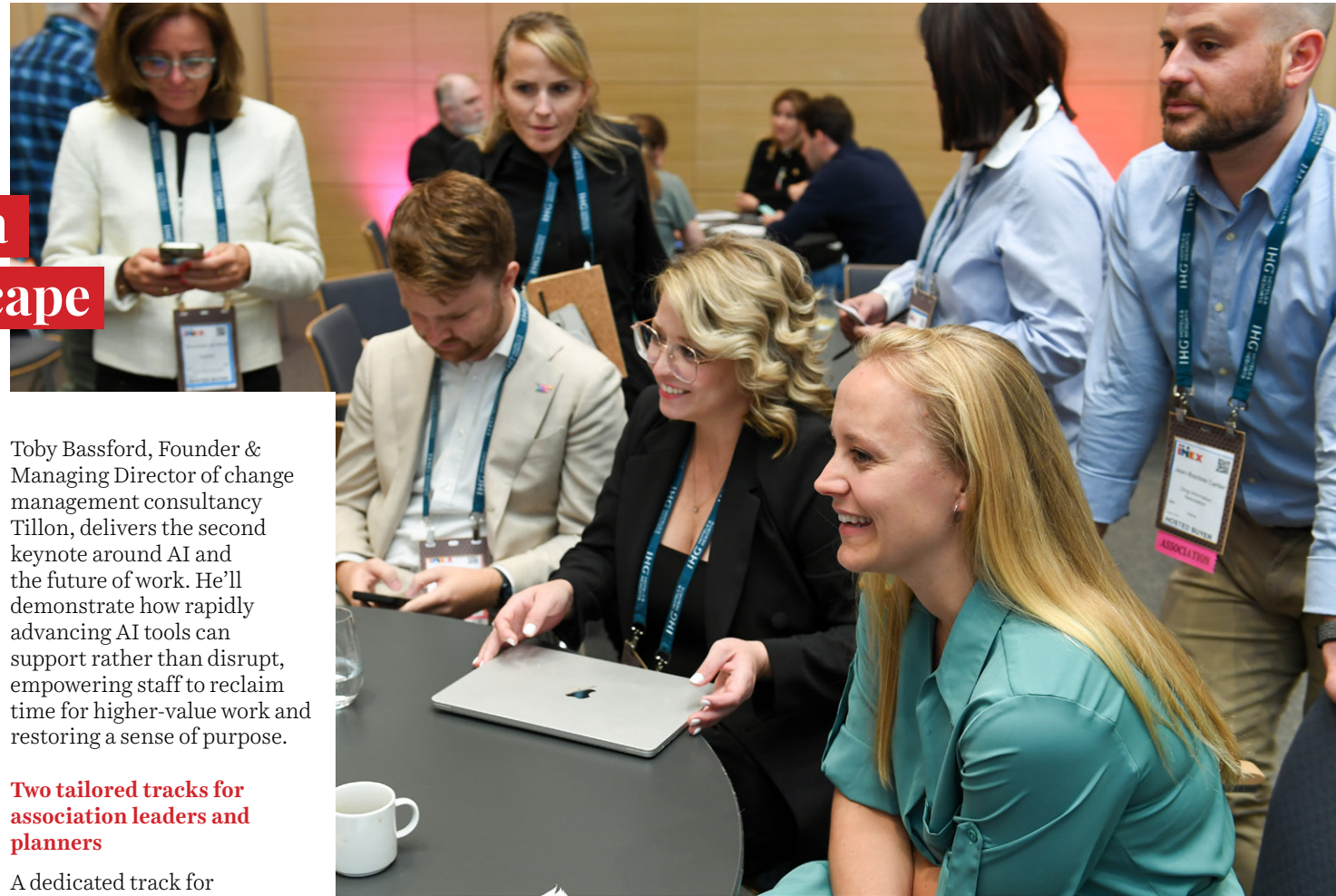
With membership retention and engagement still the number one challenge for association professionals (according to ASAE's Insight Update report), Sofya Abramchuk, co-founder of the Originate Institute and advisor at the Gaudi World Foundation, will open with a keynote exploring how revisiting an association's mission—its "origin story"—can ultimately help strengthen relationships and fuel business growth.

Toby Bassford, Founder & Managing Director of change management consultancy Tillon, delivers the second keynote around AI and the future of work. He'll demonstrate how rapidly advancing AI tools can support rather than disrupt, empowering staff to reclaim time for higher-value work and restoring a sense of purpose.

Two tailored tracks for association leaders and planners

A dedicated track for association leaders examines how associations can harness AI as a strategic advantage. Hosted by ASAE President & CEO Michelle Mason and Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, International Affairs Global Operations, sessions include a dive into the role of AI to help drive member engagement and revenue diversification.

"Associations today face continuous disruption, tighter margins and rising expectations," explains Michelle Mason. "Resilience means more than managing through change; it means using tools like AI strategically to extend our reach, improve efficiency and personalize engagement.



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Associations today face continuous disruption, tighter margins and rising expectations. Resilience means more than managing through change; it means using tools like AI strategically to extend our reach, improve efficiency and personalize engagement.



"The real task for association leaders now is to move beyond experimentation and adopt AI intentionally, in ways that strengthen mission, governance and long-term sustainability."

The track for association planners—curated by Martin Sirk, owner of Sirk Serendipity—offers a practical look at how to embed societal impact into event design and secure stakeholder buy-in along the way. A crowd-sourced segment on future-focused event practices invites attendees to share in advance the new innovations, experiments, or interesting strategic changes their associations have introduced into

their events over the past few years.

Martin shares more detail: "With the help of our pre-event survey, we'll be giving association innovators a chance to showcase what's new and impressive at their events—in only 90 seconds each!

"Attendees will also be all hands-on-deck during our provocative take on what networking really is all about, led by meeting design guru Bo Krüger, and we'll be helping associations identify their own unique "impact-opportunities" in a workshop-style session led by Meet4Impact's Genevieve Leclerc."

Why the African Travel Trade Show is thriving in a digital era

As trade show season gets underway in South Africa, traditional shows have come under fire for being antiquated, expensive and out of touch with the realities of a digital-first world. Critics argue that in an era of tech, tools and online platforms, physical events can no longer justify their cost. Yet at sold-out shows like WTM Africa, the reality feels quite different.

Far from becoming obsolete, today's leading travel shows are evolving into powerful in-person events where technology handles the heavy (admin and logistical) lifting and humans focus on the relationship-building that defines this industry. Because the travel sector has always been a "people" industry, selling high-value, high-stakes experiences.

The trust gap is real

As an example, an international agent sending a client to a remote corner of the Okavango isn't just vetting a transaction – they're staking their reputation on the entire visitor experience, from booking to arrival and beyond. Yes, online reviews and historical booking data tell part of the story – but they cannot fully bridge the "trust gap" that still exists in African travel.

Trust is built through referrals, long-standing reputations and face-to-face interaction. A conversation across a table often reveals far more about an operator's reliability, professionalism and character than an online profile can convey.

Africa's product isn't fully online

This is particularly relevant on the African continent. Many exceptional experiences and smaller operators, especially in rural or emerging destinations, have not yet made significant investments into digital marketing, SEO or AI tools. Relying solely on an online presence risks overlooking these hidden gems that add real diversity and authenticity to travel offerings. Trade shows give them a stage.

WTM Africa actively works to include emerging and community-based operators through regional pavilions and targeted matchmaking with hosted buyers. The international buyer who would never organically find a small Limpopo safari operator online can sit across from them on Tuesday morning, get a real sense of the offering, ask the right questions, and book their first group by Friday.

Importantly, modern trade shows have embraced technology to maximise efficiency and deliver strong return on investment.

AI-driven matchmaking tools now pre-schedule meetings between the right buyers and suppliers – nobody is wandering the floor hoping to bump into the right person. Delegates arrive with a targeted, data-backed itinerary and spend

their show time in high-value conversations. Real-time analytics allow organisers to fine-tune content and engagement on the spot, while digital twins of venues help attendees plan their visit in advance. These innovations do the "grunt work", streamlining calendars, reducing scheduling conflicts and creating custom itineraries tailored to each participant's needs.

The magic happens in the in-between

At WTM Africa, for example, technology is used to facilitate meaningful networking rather than replace it. The event combines smart matchmaking with immersive, relaxed activations that encourage authentic connection. One standout initiative saw the energy of a Stellenbosch Street Soirée brought directly into the CTICC, creating a setting where delegates could interact in a fun, unintimidating environment. Such community-driven experiences reflect the desire of today's professionals – including younger generations – for both efficiency and genuine human engagement.

Gen Z is choosing in-person – on purpose

The assumption that a digitally fluent generation will naturally drift away from physical events turns out to be exactly wrong. Gen Z – digital natives who have never been far from a screen – are actively seeking out immersive, in-person experiences. They value speed and efficiency (which tech delivers) and authentic human connection (which the show floor delivers). They're not attending trade shows because their bosses told them to. They're going because it's where

learning happens (for example, through considered speaker programmes), careers are built, and real conversations take place.

Critics often focus on the financial cost of exhibiting – booth space, travel, staffing and design. However, when used strategically alongside digital tools, this investment delivers long-term relationship capital that is difficult to measure through simple cost-per-lead calculations. A single strong partnership formed at a trade show can generate sustained business for years, far beyond the transactional nature of many digital leads.

As WTM Africa and other key events sell out ahead of the season, the message is clear. Trade shows are not dusty relics of an analogue past. They are evolving into sophisticated hybrid hubs where technology streamlines the process, and humans deliver the relationships that power African travel.

The writer Carol Weaving is the Managing Director, RX Africa

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Far from becoming obsolete, today's leading travel shows are evolving into powerful in-person events where technology handles the heavy (admin and logistical) lifting and humans focus on the relationship-building that defines this industry. Because the travel sector has always been a "people" industry, selling high-value, high-stakes experiences

10 Facts About MICE & Luxury Travel in Africa

1

Africa is no longer an emerging MICE market – it is a competitive one. Cities such as Cape Town, Marrakech, Kigali, Nairobi and Casablanca now compete credibly with established global destinations, offering world-class convention centres, international hotel brands and experienced professional conference organisers.

2

Luxury and MICE are increasingly intertwined on the continent. In Africa, business events are rarely standalone experiences. Conferences and incentives are designed alongside safaris, wine tourism, cultural immersion and wellness, making the destination part of the value proposition, not just the venue.

3

Africa dominates global nature-based luxury experiences. From the Serengeti and Okavango Delta to the Atlas Mountains and Indian Ocean islands, Africa offers experiential depth that few regions can replicate – a major advantage for incentive travel and executive retreats.

4

Long-haul travellers deliver disproportionate value. Although Africa receives a smaller share of global arrivals, long-haul leisure and MICE visitors account for a significantly higher share of tourism spend, making luxury and business events central to economic impact strategies.

5

Cape Town consistently leads Africa's convention rankings. According to the International Congress and Convention Association, Cape Town has ranked as Africa's top convention city for more than a decade, reflecting sustained investment in infrastructure, skills and bid competitiveness.

6

Incentive travel is one of Africa's fastest-growing MICE segments. Incentives increasingly drive demand in destinations such as Rwanda, Kenya, Morocco, Seychelles and South Africa, where exclusivity, storytelling and transformational experiences matter more than scale.

7

Africa's MICE growth is closely tied to sector development. Many major conferences on the continent align with priority sectors – mining, energy, healthcare, technology, aviation and finance – positioning MICE as a catalyst for investment, knowledge exchange and policy dialogue.

8

Sustainability is becoming a competitive differentiator. African destinations are embedding sustainability into MICE bids through community engagement, local sourcing, conservation-linked incentives and legacy programmes – not as add-ons, but as decision-making factors.

9

Regional and intra-African travel is gaining momentum. Improved air connectivity, visa reforms and continental initiatives are accelerating intra-African meetings and exhibitions, strengthening Africa-to-Africa trade and collaboration within the MICE ecosystem.

10

Africa's luxury and MICE narrative is shifting – from price to value. Rather than competing on cost, Africa is increasingly positioned around return on experience, authenticity, impact and access to unique environments. For global planners, the continent offers something increasingly rare: relevance, meaning and memorability.

Africa Meets Insight:
Africa's strength in luxury and MICE lies not in copying global models, but in redefining them – blending business with culture, scale with story, and events with long-term impact.

Policy, Tourism, and MICE

Updates - 2026

South Africa Confirms Major 2026 Tourism & MICE Calendar

South African Tourism officially announced the key dates for Meetings Africa 2026 (23–25 Feb) and Africa's Travel Indaba 2026 (11–14 May). The announcements highlight the country's ongoing strategy to position itself as a premier host for business events and industry trade shows, reinforcing its profile in the global MICE and tourism ecosystem.

WTM Africa 2026 Opens Early Trade Registration

World Travel Market Africa 2026, scheduled for 14–16 April at the Cape Town International Convention Centre, has opened trade visitor registration with free access available until 13 March 2026. The expanded event continues to serve as a critical B2B platform for tourism professionals seeking connections, insight and deal making across the African travel and events industry.

ILTM Africa 2026 to Expand Exhibitor Base and Offer New Luxury Connections

The International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM) Africa confirmed that its 2026 edition (10–12 April) will be larger and more immersive, with approximately 85 exhibitors — up from around 63 in 2025 — and a similarly increased group of hosted buyers. The event, held at Cape Town's Norval Foundation, will retain its pre-matched one-to-one meeting structure while incorporating sustainability activations and cross-region luxury travel opportunities. Notably, for 2026 organisers have introduced dedicated outbound luxury travel connections with the Middle East alongside the traditional inbound African market focus.

ATIC Returns as Investment Anchor for WTM Africa

The Africa Tourism Investment Conference (ATIC) — one of the continent's foremost tourism investment gatherings — is set for 14 April 2026 as part of WTM Africa. Produced in partnership with JLL Africa, ATIC is designed to catalyse sustainable tourism investment through high-level dialogue, networking and access to capital markets, emphasising cross-sector collaboration and financing opportunities for tourism infrastructure and growth.

Tourism Investment Community Unveils Speakers for Africa Investment Forum

The Africa Tourism Investment Conference (ATIC) earlier unveiled a powerhouse speaker line-up featuring CEOs and senior executives from major hospitality and financial institutions. The roster emphasises investor confidence and Africa's rising profile as a destination for tourism and business travel capital.

Ghana Opens 2026 with Tourism Stakeholder Forum

Early in January 2026, the Ghana Tourism Authority convened key stakeholders from hospitality, touring, events and allied sectors to align priorities for the year. The forum addressed growth strategies, market access, partnerships and digital transformation efforts to enhance Ghana's competitiveness across leisure, meetings and business tourism.

Africa's Business Tourism Gains Momentum After G20 Summit

In late 2025, South Africa's hosting of the historic G20 Summit significantly boosted business tourism confidence. According to industry observers, the event showcased Africa's capacity to host large-scale global forums, with growth in airline connectivity and rising passenger volumes supporting future MICE and corporate travel demand.

ICA's Investment in Regional Exhibitions Continues

Trade platforms across the region, including Experience Africa (UK market) and virtual events such as OurAfrica.Travel, highlight ongoing efforts to connect African travel suppliers with international buyers. These showcases reinforce the trend toward cross-border business engagement and accessibility for global tourism stakeholder

AviaDev Africa: Airlines, Destinations and Connectivity in Focus

While the official exhibition dates for AviaDev Africa 2026 are forthcoming, the platform — recognised as the leading forum connecting African airlines, aviation stakeholders and destinations — continues to shape dialogue around connectivity and air access, critical components of MICE growth and sustained business travel demand across the continent.

Africa Business Tourism and MICE Masterclass Gains Continental Momentum

The Africa Business Tourism and MICE Masterclass, previously held in August 2025, remains a cornerstone event for sector up-skilling and strategy. It brings together industry executives, government officials, and entrepreneurial professionals to share insights and evaluate emerging trends in business travel, technology, and event operations across Africa.

New MICE Trade Platforms on the Horizon

Meet Nairobi 2026 (9–11 June) is gearing up to become East Africa's premier dedicated MICE trade platform, with scheduled B2B appointments, leadership forums, and networking designed to attract buyers and exhibitors from around the world. Accredited media are welcome to apply for press access.

Global & Regional MICE Events Calendar Highlights

Industry associations and planners have released key dates through 2026, signalling a packed MICE and business travel agenda — from Meetings Africa and ILTM Africa to IMEX Frankfurt, AIME, IBTM events, and the Africa MICE Summit later in the year. This calendar underscores Africa's rising participation in the global business events ecosystem.



ATLF Returns in 2026: Why Africa's Tourism Leadership Platform Matters More Than Ever

After a year of quiet absence from the continental calendar, the Africa Tourism Leadership Forum (ATLF) is set to return in September 2026, reaffirming its place as one of Africa's most consequential convenings for tourism leadership, policy dialogue and investment-focused engagement.

From 2 to 4 September 2026, the 8th Africa Tourism Leadership Forum & Awards will take place in Polokwane, the capital of South Africa's Limpopo Province. The choice of destination is deliberate. Limpopo is widely regarded as South Africa's premier sustainable tourism province and home to some of the

continent's most recognisable natural assets, including the Kruger National Park and the Soutpansberg Mountains.

But beyond geography, ATLF's return speaks to something deeper. It signals a recalibration of Africa's tourism leadership conversation at a time when the continent is navigating post-pandemic recovery, shifting geopolitics, sustainability pressures and renewed urgency around intra-African travel.

A Platform with Continental Memory

Since its inaugural edition in Ghana in 2018, ATLF has steadily evolved into a Pan-African leadership platform

that sits at the intersection of tourism, trade, aviation, investment and policy. Subsequent editions in Rwanda and Botswana cemented its reputation as a forum where African tourism leaders could engage beyond marketing narratives and confront structural issues such as air access, skills development, destination competitiveness and the role of tourism in economic integration.

The forum's absence in 2025 was felt across the industry, particularly as Africa's tourism sector moved from recovery into growth mode. Its return in 2026 is therefore not simply a resumption, but a strategic reset.

As Africa Tourism Partners (ATP), the organisers of ATLF, prepare for the Limpopo edition, the emphasis is firmly on relevance, outcomes and continental alignment.

Why Limpopo, Why Now

Hosting ATLF in Limpopo marks a shift away from Africa's traditional conference capitals and towards destinations that combine world-class MICE capability with authentic African heritage. The province positions the Forum at the gateway to the SADC region while showcasing a province whose tourism value proposition is rooted in sustainability, conservation and community-based experiences.

This move reflects a broader ambition to decentralise Africa's business events narrative and demonstrate that leadership platforms can thrive beyond the usual urban centres. It also reinforces South Africa's continued role as a continental anchor for business events, while spotlighting provinces that are actively shaping future-facing tourism models.

From Conversation to Marketplace

The 2026 edition of ATLF is being positioned as more than a thought leadership gathering. It is framed as a marketplace for trade, innovation and strategic partnerships, bringing together tourism ministers, CEOs, investors, airlines, destination managers and development partners.

Strategic partners for the 2026 edition include the UN World Tourism Organisation, the AfCFTA Secretariat, BDO, and the Africa Tourism Private

Sector Alliance (ATPSA). Their involvement underscores the Forum's growing relevance beyond tourism marketing and into trade facilitation, investment readiness and private sector mobilisation.

According to Kwakye Donkor, CEO of Africa Tourism Partners, collaboration remains the Forum's defining principle.

"Africa does not lack ideas or destinations. What we need is deeper collaboration, stronger partnerships and platforms that turn dialogue into delivery. ATLF exists to help Africa move from fragmented ambition to shared action."

That ethos has shaped previous editions and continues to inform the 2026 agenda.

Learning from the Past, Designing the Future

Participants from earlier ATLF editions have often described the Forum as one of the few spaces where public and private sector leaders engage as equals, with room for honest dialogue. Past delegates have credited ATLF with helping to unlock regional partnerships, influence national tourism strategies and elevate African voices in global tourism discourse.

The Botswana-hosted editions, in particular, were widely praised for their focus on intra-Africa travel, youth participation and the integration of sustainability into tourism leadership. These themes are expected to remain central in Polokwane, alongside new conversations on digital transformation, destination resilience and green investment.

The Awards: Recognising African Leadership

Running alongside the Forum is the Africa Tourism Leadership Awards, a centrepiece of the ATLF platform. The Awards celebrate individuals, destinations and organisations that have demonstrated leadership, innovation and resilience across Africa's travel and tourism ecosystem.

The call for nominations for the 2026 Awards is expected to open shortly, inviting industry professionals, innovators and institutions to spotlight excellence that often goes unrecognised on global stages. Over the years, the Awards have become an important mechanism for validating African-led solutions and elevating homegrown success stories.

A Timely Return

ATLF's return in 2026 comes at a moment when Africa's tourism sector is under pressure to deliver more than visitor numbers. Governments are increasingly looking to tourism as a driver of jobs, skills development, foreign exchange and regional integration. At the same time, global travellers and investors are demanding sustainability, authenticity and measurable impact.

In this context, ATLF's re-emergence provides a timely leadership platform to align ambition with execution.

For *Africa Meets*, ATLF 2026 is not just another event, but a marker of where Africa's tourism leadership has been, where it is now, and where it intends to go next.

AviaDev Africa 2026:

Botswana Leads the Charge on Continent's Air Connectivity Revival



“It is with great pride that we welcome you to Botswana for AviaDev Africa 2026. Known for our stability, rich cultural heritage, and world-renowned natural beauty, Botswana is honoured to host this pivotal gathering of aviation leaders. Together, we will shape the future of connectivity and unlock new opportunities for Africa’s growth”, Advocate Duma Gideon Boko, President of the Republic of Botswana.

When AviaDev Africa touches down in Gaborone, Botswana from 10–12 June 2026, it will mark more than just another aviation conference on the calendar — it will spotlight the growing centrality of air connectivity to Africa’s tourism and business events future.

AviaDev Africa brings together airlines, airports and tourism authorities to drive route development and strengthen intra-African

connectivity. From its location at the Gaborone International Conference Centre (GICC), AviaDev’s 10th edition arrives at a pivotal juncture for African aviation, tourism and economic integration. After recording steady passenger traffic growth across the region, governments and private stakeholders are increasingly aligning on the view that stronger air links are essential to unlocking trade flows, and tourism potential across the continent.

A Decade of Strategy and Collaboration

Founded more than a decade ago, AviaDev Africa has grown into the foremost platform for route development in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is a forum where alliance architects, airline executives, airport leaders, aviation financiers, tourism authorities and service providers converge to debate strategy, broker partnerships and build new connections.

Its 2026 edition celebrates a

milestone — the tenth iteration under the banner “Gateway to Opportunities.” The theme reflects not just the event’s mission to foster new routes, but also its broader impact on economic connectivity and regional mobility.

Unlike traditional tourism expos or trade shows that focus primarily on marketing, AviaDev has maintained a sharp, business-to-business focus. Through pre-arranged meetings, panel discussions

and targeted networking, the conference facilitates immediate commercial dialogue between carriers and airports — often translating directly into route negotiations and investment discussions.

Botswana: A Strategic Host for Connectivity Conversations

Botswana’s bid to host the 2026 edition was driven by Botswana Air Access, a collaborative initiative led by the Civil Aviation Authority

of Botswana and aviation strategy partners such as Helm Growth Advisors. The strategy aims to improve air connectivity to and within the region, establishing the nation as a strategic aviation hub for Southern Africa.

The selection of Gaborone — with its well-connected Sir Seretse Khama International Airport — underscores the

interplay between aviation and tourism. The airport links Botswana to major African capitals including Johannesburg, Lusaka and Addis Ababa, while domestic flights serve key tourism gateways such as the Okavango Delta and Chobe National Park.

The country's tourism sector has also staged a strong

recovery. In the 2024/2025 fiscal year, Botswana saw a 9.5% increase in passenger movements, a signal of renewed confidence in air travel demand.

According to organisers, Botswana's rich biodiversity, conservation ethos and focus on low-impact, high-value tourism make it an ideal venue to explore the future of aviation in a way that aligns economic growth with sustainable development.

Programme That Drives Outcomes

Over three days, AviaDev Africa 2026 will offer delegates a robust agenda designed to address both immediate and long-term strategic priorities:

- **Finance & Leasing Forum** – A half-day segment dedicated to tackling the financing gap in African aviation by connecting airlines, lessors, financiers and development institutions. Conversations will centre on fleet investment, risk management and capital structures favouring sustainable growth.
- **Route Development Panels** – Senior airline and airport executives will debate key questions about where demand is emerging, how to match route planning with economic opportunities, and how to reduce barriers to new services.
- **Tourism & Aviation Connectivity** – A key focus session will explore how tourism stakeholders can contribute to and benefit from route development, reinforcing the interdependence of

air access and destination growth.

- **One-to-One Meetings and Networking** – Across scheduled sessions and informal spaces, targeted meetings are designed to accelerate discussions into commitments and partnerships.

These sessions reflect the industry's growing realisation that aviation cannot grow in isolation from broader economic forces — particularly tourism, trade and regional integration.

Voices from the Community

The rising profile of AviaDev Africa as a convening force was highlighted at the event's official launch in Gaborone in late 2025, when stakeholders from aviation and government reaffirmed the shared vision for stronger connectivity.

Dr Bao Mosinyi, CEO of the Civil Aviation Authority of Botswana, said the conference offered “a unique opportunity to showcase the nation's potential as a key aviation hub and a premier safari destination.” His comments emphasised the link between connectivity and the broader tourism economy.

AviaDev's Founder and CEO, Jon Howell, described Botswana's investment in air access strategy and its collaborative approach to hosting as key reasons the event was being staged there, reflecting both strong infrastructure and strong industry will.

Industry participants from previous editions have also emphasised the value of AviaDev's format. Delegates have praised the ease of

making meaningful connections and the quality of engagement in one-to-one forums, where business conversations extend beyond networking into route development and commercial planning.

As Africa's aviation landscape evolves, platforms like AviaDev are proving to be more than conferences. They are strategic accelerators of connectivity and economic integration, facilitating dialogue that can translate into concrete route launches, collaborative investments and stronger linkages across the continent.

Looking Ahead

With Botswana hosting its first AviaDev Africa event, and with

tourism and aviation increasingly entwined, AviaDev 2026 is poised to shape conversations at the intersection of connectivity and opportunity.

For Africa Meets, the gathering offers insight into how aviation leaders are thinking about the future of air travel in Africa — not as an isolated sector, but as a linchpin of tourism, business events and continental mobility.

In an era where seamless travel is a competitive advantage, AviaDev Africa stands as a strategic forum where routes are not just discussed, but imagined, negotiated and activated.

SIDEBAR

Why AviaDev Africa 2026 Matters for Africa Meets Readers

AviaDev Africa is not just an aviation gathering — it is a connectivity marketplace with direct implications for tourism, MICE and luxury travel across the continent.

Here's why it matters:

Air Access Drives Events Growth Major conferences, exhibitions and incentive programmes follow air routes. Improved connectivity makes African cities more competitive for global meetings, luxury travellers and high-value delegations.

From Routes to Revenue

Each new or strengthened route discussed at AviaDev has a multiplier effect — boosting hotel occupancy, venue utilisation, destination branding and local employment.

Infrastructure Meets Opportunity

Hosting AviaDev at the Gaborone International Conference Centre underscores how modern MICE infrastructure must be matched with efficient air links to unlock

full economic impact.

Tourism Has a Seat at the Table

Unlike traditional aviation forums, AviaDev actively integrates tourism boards, convention bureaux and destination marketers, ensuring routes align with real demand — leisure, business and events.

Sustainability in Focus

With Botswana's eco-tourism credentials, discussions extend beyond growth to responsible aviation, regional connectivity and long-term destination resilience.

Strategic Location

By hosting in Botswana, AviaDev 2026 places Southern Africa firmly in conversations around intra-African travel, SADC connectivity and gateway cities.

Bottom line:

For Africa Meets readers, AviaDev Africa 2026 offers a clear message — the future of African tourism and business events will be shaped in aviation boardrooms as much as in convention halls





Janet Karemera on Rwanda's MICE Strategy: Building Kigali into Africa's Benchmark Meetings Destination

Rwanda has steadily positioned itself as one of Africa's most organised and future-focused meetings destinations. At the centre of this strategy is a clear understanding that MICE is not just about venues, but about national coordination, policy alignment and long-term economic impact.

In this interview, the Chief Executive Officer of the Rwanda Convention Bureau talks about how Rwanda is preparing to host the International Congress and Conventions Association congress in 2027 and also outlines how Kigali has evolved into a competitive hub for international conferences and business events, anchored by world-class infrastructure, strong public-private collaboration and a deliberate focus on sustainability, ease of access and delegate experience.

What did securing the hosting rights for the ICCA Congress 2027 represent for Kigali and for Rwanda's wider ambition

within the global meetings industry?

Answer: Securing the ICCA Congress 2027 marks a defining milestone for Rwanda's journey in the global meetings industry, built through deliberate and sustained effort. It reflects the strength of our international partnerships, particularly with the International Congress and Convention Association, and the intentional work led by the Rwanda Convention Bureau and the local ecosystem to position Rwanda as a premium MICE destination.

Hosting a congress of this calibre not only demonstrates our growing capability, but also strengthens our credibility and competitiveness, firmly positioning Kigali among globally trusted destinations for international events.

How does hosting ICCA 2027 accelerate Rwanda's long-term strategy to position Kigali as a leading MICE and business events hub in Africa?

Answer: I would say that hosting ICCA 2027 will further accelerate Rwanda's



long-term strategy to position Kigali as a leading MICE and Business Events hub in Africa and beyond. This milestone will elevate our global visibility and reinforce our reputation as a premium MICE destination. More importantly, the ICCA Congress will create opportunities to deepen strategic partnerships and strengthen long-term collaborations, which are essential for developing a competitive MICE ecosystem. It will also be an amazing opportunity for all our friends in the industry who have expressed interest to visit Rwanda, to finally come and experience our destination.

What key strengths across venues, professional conference services, hospitality and transport give Rwanda the confidence to deliver an event of ICCA's global scale?

Answer: Our confidence in hosting ICCA 2027 comes from Rwanda's proven ability to



deliver major global events seamlessly, from Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2022, Women Deliver 2023 to the FIFA 73rd Congress 2023, World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) 2023, and FIA General Assembly and Awards 2024 and many more.

This is supported by world-class infrastructure anchored by the Kigali Convention Centre and a deliberately developed ecosystem that extends Rwanda's capacity beyond traditional conferencing. Venues such as BK Arena, Amahoro Stadium, and Zaria Court collectively anchor Kigali's Sports City identity, reflecting a long-term vision to position the city as a hub for international sports and entertainment, capable of hosting global concerts, major sporting events, and large-scale gatherings, while complementing the broader MICE offering. Backed by a rapidly expanding hospitality sector and the

coordinated efforts of the Rwanda Convention Bureau, we are able to align venues, transport, and services with government priorities.

This unified approach ensures efficiency, safety, and excellence across the MICE value chain. It is further strengthened by collaboration with professional conference organisers, additional venues, and seamless entry processes such as visa on arrival, ensuring every aspect of the delegate experience is professionally managed.

Beyond the congress itself, what lasting economic, skills and reputational legacy do you expect ICCA 2027 to leave for Rwanda and the region?

Answer: We are very intentional about the legacy of ICCA 2027. Beyond the immediate impact of hosting such a major congress, we expect it to generate significant economic value through increased business tourism and investment. Equally important is the transfer of knowledge, skills, and global networks into the local ecosystem. In partnership with the International Congress and Convention Association and our other partners, we will develop an inclusive legacy programme



Janet Karemera, Chief Executive Officer of the Rwanda Convention Bureau



empowering youth, women, and persons with disabilities to play an active role in the meetings and events industry.

How important is this congress in reshaping global perceptions of Africa as a credible, competitive and innovative destination for international meetings?

Answer: The ICCA Congress plays an important role in reshaping global perceptions of Africa, demonstrating that the continent is not only capable but also highly competitive on the global stage, able to host and deliver international, high-profile events to the highest standard. Its return to Africa after more than 20 years is particularly significant, marking a renewed opportunity to showcase the continent's progress, capacity, and readiness.

Africa also offers a unique value proposition through its rich and diverse cultures, creating truly memorable delegate experiences. For ICCA 2027, we plan to work closely with partners across the continent to showcase the full depth and diversity of Africa's MICE offering, while strengthening collaboration and amplifying a more inclusive and representative global meetings industry.

Africa Meets focuses on the intersection of MICE and luxury travel. How is Rwanda curating premium experiences that appeal to high-level delegates, association leaders and incentive travelers?

Answer: Rwanda has established a strong reputation for delivering premium, end-to-end experiences that extend well beyond business events. Building on this foundation, we are working closely with the private sector to develop attractive, tailored packages that offer greater value and seamless experiences for our guests.

From high-level meetings at the Kigali Convention Centre to luxury stays at the Kigali Marriott Hotel and the Radisson Blu Hotel & Convention Centre, Kigali, delegates benefit from world-class service, smooth logistics, and curated networking opportunities.

Beyond business, Rwanda offers exceptional experiences from gorilla trekking in Volcanoes National Park to exclusive retreats at Singita Kwitonda Lodge and One&Only Nyungwe House positioning the country as a distinctive destination where business and leisure are seamlessly integrated



Rwanda is recognized for its sustainability ethos. How will responsible and sustainable practices be embedded into tourism in general and MICE in particular?

Answer: Sustainability in Rwanda is not an add-on, it is core to our society. From national policies to on-the-ground delivery, responsible practices are embedded in everything we do. This includes our ban on plastic bags, limiting single-use plastics, promoting greener venues, sourcing locally, improving transport efficiency, and ensuring events contribute to local livelihoods. By integrating sustainability at every level, Rwanda is setting a standard for responsible, high-quality, and inclusive MICE experiences that endure well beyond each event.

How does the Kigali Convention Centre work with the government and the private sector to ensure service excellence and global standards across the MICE value chain?

Answer: The Kigali Convention Centre is one of Africa's iconic venues. The venue is owned by the Government of Rwanda and managed by the Radisson Blu. We operate through close collaboration between the public and private sectors to support event bidding, planning, and delivery to international standards.



The KCC is complemented by other key venues within Sports City, including BK Arena, as well as Intare Arena, ensuring a cohesive and high-quality MICE offering across the destination.

What policy frameworks or government support mechanisms have been most critical in Rwanda's success in attracting major international congresses?

Answer: Rwanda's success in attracting major international congresses, such as ICCA 2027, stems from a strategic alignment of policy, investment, and execution. By prioritizing business events within its economic agenda, the Government, through the Rwanda Convention Bureau, provides structured support for bidding, hosting, and promoting international events.

Investor-friendly policies, streamlined regulations, seamless visa processes, and a secure, stable environment build confidence among global organizers. Coupled with world-class venues and a growing hospitality sector, these frameworks enable Rwanda to deliver high-impact, professionally executed meetings.

How can African destinations collaborate more effectively to grow the continent's share of the global MICE market?

Answer: Africa is already

demonstrating strong collaboration, as seen in joint efforts to secure major events such as ICCA 2027 and other international congresses. However, there is always room for improvement. As a continent, Africa has significant untapped potential in the global MICE market, and growing our share will require more deliberate alignment of standards, stronger knowledge-sharing, and a more unified voice.

Expanding joint initiatives, from coordinated marketing to deeper regional partnerships, will be key to effectively showcasing the continent's diversity, cultural richness, and growing capabilities in hosting international business events.

At the Rwanda Convention Bureau, there is a strong focus on collaboration, bringing together government, private sector, and institutional partners to deliver seamless and high-quality experiences. By working closely with partners across the continent, African destinations can continue to strengthen their collective competitiveness and showcase the diversity and depth of their MICE offerings on the global stage.

What role do credible platforms like Africa Meets play in strengthening Africa's voice in global business events conversations?

Answer: Platforms like Africa Meets are vital in ensuring Africa's voice is heard in global business events. They provide a credible space to share the continent's progress, potential, and ambitions. Rwanda's experience in hosting international events offers practical examples, and a platform like Africa Meets helps highlight best practices, foster collaboration, and attract investment that benefits the wider region.

What message would you like to send to international associations, corporate planners and luxury travel buyers considering Africa – and Rwanda – for their next global event?

Answer: Africa is stepping confidently onto the global MICE stage and offers immense potential for world-class meetings and events. Rwanda exemplifies this potential with a seamless combination of premium infrastructure, high-level service, and unforgettable cultural and leisure experiences. International associations, corporate planners, and luxury travel buyers can expect events delivered with precision, sustainability, and lasting impact, while also connecting with the broader opportunities that Africa presents.

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Beyond accommodation, Seychelles excels in experiential richness – a critical factor for modern incentive travel. Delegates can move seamlessly from yacht-based island hopping and snorkelling in marine parks to guided nature walks in UNESCO-listed reserves, Creole cooking experiences, or sunset receptions on untouched beaches. These are not generic add-ons, but authentic, place-based experiences that leave lasting emotional impressions.

SEYCHELLES:

Where Incentive Travel Becomes an Experience of a Lifetime

In the competitive world of incentive travel – the “I” in MICE – destinations are increasingly judged not just on logistics and luxury, but on their ability to inspire, reward and emotionally engage top performers. In this regard, Seychelles has emerged as one of the most compelling incentive destinations globally, offering an exceptional blend of exclusivity, natural beauty and high-touch experiences that few destinations can replicate.

At its core, Seychelles delivers what incentive travel is meant to do: make people feel genuinely rewarded. Scattered across 115 islands in the Indian Ocean, the destination offers a sense of escape that is immediate and profound. For high-performing teams and executives, the journey itself signals distinction – Seychelles is not a mass destination, and that rarity is central to its appeal.

Luxury in Seychelles is defined less by ostentation and more by space, privacy and immersion. World-class resorts across Mahé, Praslin and private islands are designed to deliver bespoke experiences, whether it is villa-only accommodation, dedicated butler services or curated island buyouts for exclusive groups. This level of intimacy allows incentive planners to design programmes that feel deeply personal, reinforcing recognition and loyalty among participants.



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Creole cooking experiences, or sunset receptions on untouched beaches. These are not generic add-ons, but authentic, place-based experiences that leave lasting emotional impressions.

Importantly, Seychelles has also positioned itself as a destination aligned

with modern corporate values. Sustainability and conservation are not marketing buzzwords here – they are embedded in policy and practice. Incentive programmes increasingly integrate purpose-driven activities, such as marine conservation initiatives,

community engagement or sustainability-focused excursions. For companies seeking to align rewards with ESG goals, Seychelles offers credibility and substance.

From a planning perspective, Seychelles punches above its weight. The destination is well served by international air links from Europe, the Middle East and Africa, making it accessible while still retaining its sense of remoteness. On the ground, experienced destination management companies and hospitality teams understand the expectations of incentive



groups, delivering seamless execution with a personal touch that larger destinations often struggle to maintain.

Crucially, Seychelles also benefits from political stability, safety and a welcoming environment – non-negotiables for incentive travel decision-makers. Combined with English and French widely spoken, and a strong service culture, this ensures ease of communication and operational confidence for international planners.

As incentive travel evolves towards fewer but more meaningful programmes, Seychelles stands firmly in the sweet spot. It offers the emotional payoff, exclusivity and authenticity that high-performing individuals value, while giving organisations a destination that reflects success, responsibility and aspiration.

In a crowded incentive marketplace, Seychelles does not compete on scale – it competes on significance. And for incentive travel, that distinction makes all the difference.

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Luxury in Seychelles is defined less by ostentation and more by space, privacy and immersion

Enabling Africa's MICE Sector Through Inclusive Digital Innovation

Enabling Africa's MICE Sector Through Inclusive Digital Innovation

Africa's MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions sector) is undergoing rapid transformation. Fueled by increasing investment, urban development and rising demand for intra-continental business engagement, the sector is positioned to play a central role in Africa's economic evolution. Yet, longstanding barriers - from fragmented supplier



networks to limited digital visibility for small businesses - continue to constrain its potential.

Hallpax, an event management firm founded by Mahi Tadesse,

recognized the untapped potential and fragmented nature of MICE industry suppliers across Africa. In response, the company developed a digital B2B platform designed to bridge the gap—connecting event vendors with buyers seeking rentals, purchases, and services across the continent in a more efficient and transparent way.

Addressing Real Challenges with Smart Tools

“The continent is moving forward in so many exciting ways—cities are growing, new hotels are opening, and the MICE industry is really taking shape. But the truth is, so many incredible suppliers are still flying under the radar,” says Tadesse.

She reflects on how Hallpax has grown into a network of service providers across more than 14 countries, including Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, and Rwanda. Yet despite this growth, finding a reliable list of vendors across the continent continues to be one of the biggest challenges in executing events.

“A lot of small businesses don't have websites or access to digital platforms. They're offering outstanding service, but people just don't know how to find them,” she adds.

A Marketplace Designed for Africa's MICE Industry

The Hallpax Marketplace is a purpose-built digital platform created to address the unique needs of Africa's Meetings,

Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector. It offers service providers—from AV and hospitality specialists to local artisans and printing companies—a structured, easy-to-navigate company profile page to showcase their offerings.

Optimized for mobile and designed with simplicity in mind, the platform makes it easy for even the smallest vendors to manage inquiries, respond to leads, and stay connected with clients—anytime, anywhere.

To help businesses grow, Hallpax features a built-in CRM tool that enables vendors to monitor performance and benchmark anonymously against peers. For example, a vendor in Lusaka can see how their engagement compares to similar providers in their region.

The platform also hosts city-specific pages that include curated vendor directories, visa and travel information, and links to local tourism and government resources—serving as informal convention bureau hubs that simplify event planning across the continent.

Inclusion Without Barriers

Hallpax was built with accessibility at its core—removing traditional obstacles that often exclude small businesses. The platform is free to use, allows vendors to maintain full control of their client relationships, and charges no commissions. No gatekeeping, just open access.

“We wanted to make it simple and fair,” says Tadesse. “Small businesses often deliver outstanding service, but they're shut out of larger

opportunities. The Hallpax Marketplace is here to change that.”

Since its soft launch in March, Hallpax has welcomed hundreds of suppliers and is on track to surpass 1,000 verified vendors by year's end—creating strong coverage across key business hubs throughout the continent..

Beyond Visibility: Building Business Momentum

Hallpax is doing more than bridging the gap between buyers and sellers—it's accelerating the digital transformation of Africa's MICE sector. With a smart, scalable platform, it's helping power local economies, uplift small businesses, and strengthen regional business collaboration.

“Africa doesn't need to reinvent itself,” says Tadesse. “We just need to connect the dots—and the Hallpax Marketplace is one of the tools that can help make that happen.”

As Africa's business events landscape continues to grow, the Hallpax Marketplace serves as a powerful example of how technology, when designed with empathy and purpose, can drive meaningful and lasting change.



Africa Travel Week 2026 Delivers Measurable Growth, Strategic Clarity and Renewed Confidence in African Tourism

Cape Town, South Africa – Africa Travel Week 2026 concluded with strong commercial outcomes, clear strategic signals and growing confidence in Africa's tourism, luxury and business events sectors. Anchored by ILTM Africa and WTM Africa, the week once again confirmed its position as the continent's most influential tourism marketplace, bringing together

global buyers, African suppliers, policymakers and industry leaders at a pivotal moment for the sector.

Hosted at the Norval Foundation and the Cape Town International Convention Centre as well as a network of partner venues across the city, Africa Travel Week 2026 attracted over 6,000 registered trade visitors, including more



than 1,200 hosted buyers from Europe, North America, the Middle East, Asia and key African source markets. Collectively, the programme facilitated tens of thousands of pre-scheduled meetings, reinforcing Cape Town's role as the gateway city for pan-African tourism trade.

Buyer Quality, Not Volume, Defines 2026

A defining feature of Africa Travel Week 2026 was the continued emphasis on buyer quality rather than scale alone. Across both ILTM Africa and WTM Africa, exhibitors reported longer meeting durations, deeper commercial discussions

and a noticeable shift from exploratory conversations to near-term contracting.

Luxury travel suppliers highlighted sustained demand for private travel, conservation-led experiences and high-touch ground services, while mainstream and corporate exhibitors reported increased interest in Africa-based incentives, conferences and multi-country itineraries.

The official opening address of WTM Africa was delivered by Alderman James Vos, Mayoral Committee Member for Economic Growth, whose keynote speech set the intellectual and economic tone for the show. This was followed by the ribbon-cutting ceremony, after which Patricia de Lille, South Africa's Minister of Tourism, officially opened the trading floor, signalling the start of three days of deal-making, networking and industry exchange.

Sustainability Becomes a Procurement Standard

One of the most consistent signals to emerge from Africa Travel Week 2026 was the repositioning of sustainability from a communications narrative to a procurement requirement. Buyers across leisure, luxury and corporate segments increasingly requested verifiable emissions data, community impact metrics and transparent supply-chain practices from African suppliers.

This shift was especially visible within ground mobility, accommodation and experiential tourism, where buyers signalled that sustainability credentials now directly influence

contracting decisions rather than marketing perception.

Across the exhibition floor, sustainability was presented as operational infrastructure rather than aspiration – from carbon-tracked transport services to locally rooted culinary and cultural programmes designed to retain value within host communities.

MICE and Business Events Move Centre Stage

Africa's business events sector emerged as a central pillar of Africa Travel Week 2026, reflecting the continent's growing ambition in meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions. Destinations showcased expanded convention capacity, new hotel developments and policy reforms aimed at winning rotating global congresses and large-scale corporate events.

The presence of international association buyers, professional conference organisers and incentive specialists reinforced

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Cape Town's international flights have surged to over 230 per week, and tourism now supports over 106,000 jobs in the city...It is an investment that delivers real economic returns... the impact goes far beyond these few days. It translates into future bookings, sustained demand, and long-term growth.

— Alderman James Vos, City of Cape Town



Africa's positioning not only as a leisure destination, but as a credible and competitive business events host.

Carol Weaving, Managing Director of RX Africa, described the evolution clearly. "Africa Travel Week has evolved into a powerful in-person event where technology handles the heavy lifting, and humans focus on the relationship building that defines this industry. Our people are our superpower."

Cape Town Reinforces Its Host-City Advantage

Cape Town's role as host city once again demonstrated the importance of integrated urban infrastructure in winning major trade events. Air access, hotel inventory, safety, lifestyle appeal and venue quality combined to deliver a seamless experience for delegates moving

between meetings, networking events and off-site activations.

The city's ability to host multiple high-level trade programmes simultaneously strengthened its reputation as Africa's most established MICE destination and a benchmark

“Africa Travel Week has evolved into a powerful in-person event where technology handles the heavy lifting, and humans focus on the relationship building that defines this industry. Our people are our superpower.”

— Carol Weaving,
Managing Director, RX
Africa

for other cities seeking to grow their events economy.

Alderman Vos highlighted the tangible economic impact, noting that Cape Town's international flights have surged to over 230 per week, and tourism now supports over 106,000 jobs in the city. He stated, "It is an investment that delivers real economic returns... the impact goes far beyond these few days. It translates into future bookings, sustained demand, and long-term growth."

Pan-African Collaboration Gains Momentum

Beyond individual destination promotion, Africa Travel Week 2026 reflected a growing pan-African mindset. Regional tourism bodies, national tourism organisations and private sector operators

increasingly emphasised collaboration, cross-border circuits and shared storytelling as mechanisms for scaling Africa's global appeal.

Visa reform, air connectivity and harmonised policy frameworks featured prominently in discussions, with industry leaders acknowledging that Africa's competitiveness depends as much on cooperation as on individual destination excellence.

Commercial Outcomes and Industry Outlook

While final post-event surveys are still being compiled, early indicators suggest that Africa Travel Week 2026 delivered strong return on investment for exhibitors, particularly those aligned with luxury, experiential travel and MICE. Many participants reported confirmed bookings, site

inspections scheduled within weeks of the event and follow-up meetings already translating into contracts.

For buyers, the week reinforced Africa's relevance in a highly competitive global travel environment, particularly as travellers seek destinations offering authenticity, value and meaningful experiences.

"We are not immune to global economic pressures," Weaving noted. "But what Africa Travel Week consistently shows is

that Africa remains resilient, adaptable and increasingly strategic. The fundamentals are strong, and the appetite for the continent is real."

A Strategic Checkpoint for African Tourism

As Africa Travel Week 2026 drew to a close, it was clear that the events had evolved beyond traditional trade shows. They now function as a strategic checkpoint for African tourism – a place where market realities are tested, priorities are refined and the future direction of the industry is debated openly.

The messages from 2026 are unambiguous. Growth will be driven by value, not volume. Sustainability will be measured, not claimed. And Africa's tourism competitiveness will depend on execution, collaboration and credibility.

For Africa Meets, Africa Travel Week 2026 stands as evidence that the continent is not merely recovering or repositioning – it is actively redefining its role in the global tourism economy, on its own terms



The Durban Nexus: Why Indaba 2026 is Africa's Narrative High-Ground

As you hold this maiden issue of *Africa Meets*, the continent's tourism elite are descending upon the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre in Durban. From 11 - 14 May 2026, Africa's Travel Indaba returns, not merely as a trade show, but as a declaration of intent. This year feels different. Following a rigorous and competitive procurement process, Durban has been confirmed as the home of Indaba for the next five years. This half-decade commitment provides the stability needed to move beyond short-term goals and focus on a long-term transformation of the African travel story.

A Foundation of Stability

The confirmation of Johannesburg and Durban as the respective homes for Meetings Africa and Africa's Travel Indaba through 2030 is a masterstroke of strategic tourism planning. As Minister of Tourism Patricia de Lille recently noted, these events

are critical economic levers. By securing these world-class venues for the long term, South Africa is not just hosting events; it is building a reliable platform for job creation and intra-African trade.

For Durban, being entrusted with Indaba for another five years is a testament to its exceptional infrastructure and its track record as a gracious host. As Rev. Musa Zondi, KZN MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, aptly stated, Indaba is a backdrop that positions the province as an exceptional destination for both business and leisure - and even as a premier location for global film production.

"The impact of Africa's Travel Indaba goes beyond the three days of business," Rev. Zondi said. "It allows KZN to showcase itself as an exceptional destination for both leisure and business travel, while creating immeasurable opportunities for emerging

tourism entrepreneurs to secure deals that can transform their businesses."

He added that the international visibility generated by Indaba also strengthens KwaZulu-Natal's positioning as a viable film destination for large-scale productions.

Beyond the Safari Silhouette

For decades, the global marketing of African travel was often reduced to a singular, predictable silhouette: the sunset over the savannah. Indaba 2026 signals the definitive end of that era. Walking the floor of the Durban ICC this year, one will see more than just brochures for game drives; one will encounter a continent selling its **intellectual and creative capital**. From the tech-integrated "Smart Cities" of Rwanda to the high-fashion heritage routes of Senegal and the bustling creative hubs of Accra and Lagos, exhibitors are challenging international



touch that ensures the African story is told with precision and passion.

The Sustainability of Soul

While the "Sustainability Village" remains a staple, the 2026 definition of sustainability has expanded. The focus has shifted to the "Local Hero" - the artisans, chefs, and community leaders who are the true custodians of the African experience. By bringing these SMEs to the forefront, Indaba ensures that the economic impact of tourism is felt at the roots. This alignment of profit and purpose is exactly what the modern, conscious traveller is seeking, and Africa is uniquely positioned to lead this global shift.

A New Chapter Begins

It is no coincidence that *Africa Meets* chooses this moment for its maiden voyage. Indaba 2026 provides the raw, vibrant energy of a continent in motion, while *Africa Meets* provides the context and the voice.

As the doors open in Durban this May, the success of Indaba will be measured by more than just the volume of business transacted. It will be measured by a collective realisation that Africa is not just a place to visit, but a place to learn, to grow, and to be inspired. The new African story is being written in Durban this week, and through the pages of this magazine, you have a front-row seat.

Welcome to the future of African travel. Welcome to Africa Meets.

buyers to look deeper. The mission has shifted from "selling beds" to "sharing perspectives." This is where the strategic storytelling of the future begins - by presenting Africa as a continent of contemporary sophistication rather than just a collection of landscapes.

The Intellectual Furnace: BONDAY 2026

The event commences with the Business Opportunity Networking Day (BONDAY) on 11 May. It has evolved into the industry's most critical intellectual furnace, and the 2026 agenda is particularly telling. The discourse has moved beyond recovery metrics into the "Economy of Belonging" - exploring how travel can foster a sense of global African identity and diaspora connection.

Key discussions around the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) are no longer dry policy debates; they are

the "veins" of the continent's storytelling. When we improve air access, we do not just move passengers; we accelerate the exchange of our stories. For the readers of *Africa Meets*, BONDAY is the prologue to the deals that will be signed on the trade floor in the days following.

Digital Frontiers and Cultural Currency

A standout feature of the 2026 edition is the "Content Creator Nexus." Recognising that the modern traveller's journey begins on a smartphone screen, Indaba has integrated a heavy focus on digital aesthetics and immersive media.

This isn't just about "pretty pictures." It is about **Cultural Currency**. By leveraging augmented reality and immersive storytelling, African destinations are allowing buyers to "feel" the energy of a Lagos street market or the serenity of a Moroccan riad before a single contract is inked. It is a sophisticated blend of tech and

AFRICA'S TRAVEL INDABA

Sidebar: The Five-Year Anchor (2026–2030)

The 2026 edition of Africa's Travel Indaba marks more than just a return to Durban; it signals a new era of stability for the continent's premier leisure trade show. Following a competitive and rigorous bidding process, South African Tourism has officially confirmed the **Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre (Durban ICC)** as the home of Indaba for the next five years.

This half-decade commitment provides a strategic "anchor" for the industry, allowing for long-term investment in the show's infrastructure and a consistent platform for the continent's storytelling.

Durban: The Gateway to the World

A Proven Track Record: The selection of Durban underscores the city's world-class infrastructure and its exceptional track record in hosting the global tourism fraternity.

Beyond the Trade Floor: For KwaZulu-Natal, the impact of Indaba extends far beyond the four days of business. It serves as a vital showcase for the province's diverse landscapes—positioning it not only as a leisure and business hub but also as an emerging destination for international film and creative productions.

Grassroots Impact: The five-year tenure offers immeasurable opportunities for emerging tourism entrepreneurs. By providing a consistent stage, Indaba empowers local SMEs to strike deals that can propel their businesses into the global market.



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Inside ILTM Africa: Why This Is Not Just Another Luxury Travel Trade Show



There are luxury travel trade shows that trade in scale, and then there are those that trade in substance. By the second day of **International Luxury Travel Market Africa**, the distinction between the two had become unmistakably clear.

Rather than overwhelming delegates with size and spectacle, ILTM Africa continues to position itself as a deliberately intimate marketplace – one where time, place and experience are used to deepen commercial relationships rather than

distract from them. In Cape Town, luxury is not being presented as aspiration alone, but as context, credibility and connection.

A Marketplace Designed Around Human Exchange

From the outset, the structure of ILTM Africa encourages meaningful interaction. One-to-one meetings remain the backbone, but what happens around those meetings is just as important. Coffee conversations spill into gallery walks. Sales discussions extend into vineyard lunches. First

meetings quickly become familiar exchanges.

That human dimension is not accidental. Olivia Gradidge, Marketing Manager for WTM Africa and ILTM Africa, captured the essence of what the show is designed to deliver.

“It’s been really wonderful to see how at ILTM Africa we are seeing those business connections coming together and making friends from the start. That’s what it’s all about, connecting our partners, connecting new business and driving business forward.”



In an industry increasingly shaped by long-term partnerships rather than short-term transactions, that sense of trust is currency.

Norval Foundation – When Venue Becomes Strategy

The decision to host ILTM Africa at the **Norval Foundation** continues to resonate strongly with participants. More than an aesthetic choice, the venue reflects how luxury and business events are evolving – away from anonymous halls and towards spaces that stimulate curiosity and emotional engagement.

Johann Vogen of the Norval Foundation explained how the setting actively influences how the event is experienced. “What we experience is that people tend to use the opportunity of the uniqueness of the venue to their advantage. So it’s not just a normal conference that you would have in any conference venue.”

He added: “During a breakout, they actually have an art experience as well, exposure to that as well. So it’s not just a conference. It’s very personalized and obviously targeted at a specific target market that we align with in terms of our visitors as well.”

For luxury and MICE planners alike, this reinforces a growing truth – environment is no longer peripheral to business outcomes; it is central to them.

Klein Constantia – Selling Place Through Story

The experience-driven narrative continued offsite at **Klein Constantia Wine Estate**, where a hosted lunch placed heritage and hospitality firmly in the spotlight.

Pascal Asin, CEO of Klein Constantia, framed the estate not simply as a wine producer, but as part of South Africa’s broader destination story. “First of all, South Africa, I think, is

becoming a place to be. People want to visit South Africa, and there’s so many things to still discover.”

For Asin, the objective is visibility as much as excellence. “We’re one kind of farm that people are not much aware of it. So we want to open the doors. We want to show to the world that we have been there since 340 years and before the others.”

He was clear about what the estate offers. “What we do today is try to explore the farm, and we do three things extremely well. In fact, we do hospitality.”

Exhibitors on Why ILTM Africa Feels Different

For exhibitors, the difference between ILTM Africa and other global luxury shows is tangible. Caroline Laurence, Commercial Director of Autograph Collection Hotels, spoke candidly about the value of the buyer mix.



“The last few days at ILTM Africa has really been incredible. Just the level of buyers that we’ve been meeting with have been really exactly what Mapito is looking for in terms of partnership.”

She emphasised that the experience extended beyond the meeting table. “It’s also been great to go out and network a little bit outside of this environment as well... just really a fantastic overall experience.”

Eva Mwangi of Tribe Collections Kenya offered a comparative perspective, having attended ILTM editions in Singapore and Cannes. “This is a more boutique expo that’s bringing people together who become like family.”

“You’re getting the ones who you wouldn’t get in the big shows,” she added. If you miss this one, it’s not guaranteed you’ll see these same agents in another show.”

Growth, New Markets and Why It Matters

From an organiser’s standpoint, the strategic impact is measurable. Speaking earlier in the week, Carol Weaving, CEO of **RX Africa**, highlighted a defining statistic.

“We obviously have 42 countries that are participating... and 87% of those are new to selling Cape Town and South Africa.”



In a competitive global luxury market, that signals not saturation, but expansion.

Purpose Beyond Profit

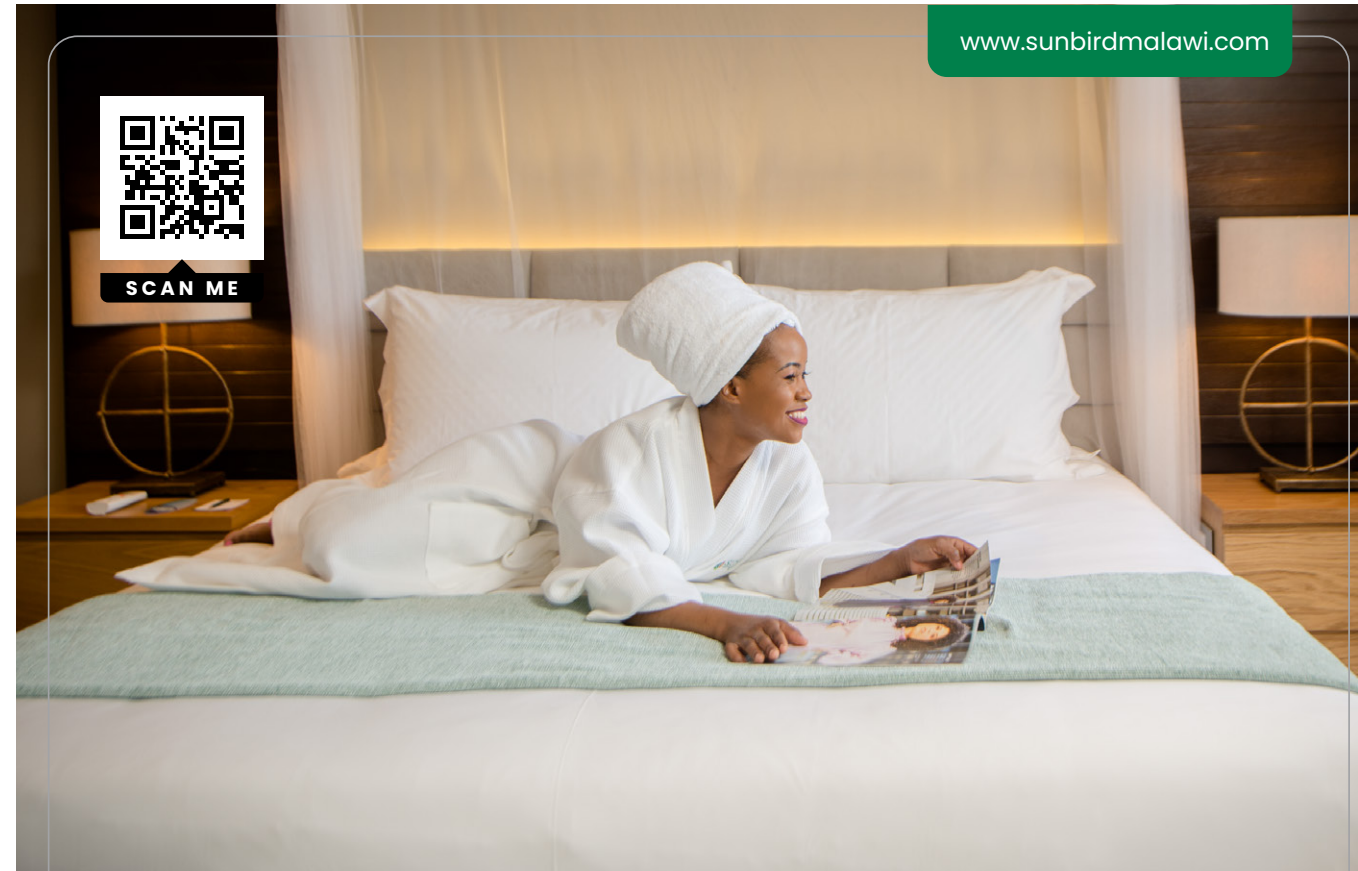
ILTM Africa also continues to weave purpose into its fabric. Conservation-led initiatives, such as the Painted Wolf Wines fundraising project highlighted by Emma Borg, remind delegates that African luxury travel is inseparable from stewardship. “Please come and support and you’ll be supporting the conservation of African painted dogs.”

A Quiet Confidence

What emerges from day two is a quiet confidence – not driven by hype, but by design. ILTM Africa is not trying to be the biggest show on the calendar. It is positioning itself as one of the most intentional. In doing so, it offers a compelling blueprint for how Africa can host luxury travel and MICE conversations on its own terms – grounded, authentic and unmistakably human.



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