

TOURISM IN AFRICA IS GROWING THE MOST



Tourism in Africa has been dynamically growing. 300 million international tourist arrivals were recorded in the months of July and August 2017, according to the World Tourism Barometer, which is a record numbers.

According to this report by UNWTO, the Africa region - which includes Mauritius and Seychelles - is ahead of all the other regions due to its growth rate of 9%. **In North Africa, growth was 14% whereas it was only 5% in sub-Saharan Africa.**

Moreover, according to the latest data released by Statistics Mauritius, from January to October 2017, the tourist volume increased by 5.3% in Mauritius. The African region accounted for 23% of tourist arrivals - an increase of 4.7% - representing 10 920 additional visitors compared to the previous year.

According to hoteliers, this market is expected to grow even further; hoteliers like Ramesh Mawood, Sales Executive for Beachcomber Resorts & Hotels, noted that "there is indeed an increase in the number of customers coming from Kenya and Tanzania".

In an interview, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Mauritius's hotel and restaurant operators' association (AHRIM), Jocelyn Kwok, said that "we have an excellent African clientele in our hotel establishments, a clientele which is already familiar with Mauritius and which has been coming back regularly for years." However, he added that this type of clients is limited in number.

Except for tourists from South Africa, Jocelyn Kwok evoked the difficulties in attracting tourists from the African continent. "Each country on the continent constitutes a unique market". The African region has some 50 countries with a combined total population of around 1.2 billion.

The CEO of AHRIM also mentioned that in order to develop this market in a sustainable way, certain key elements would need to be ensured. In particular, the accommodation capacity of a particular destination, its accessibility by air, Mauritius's competitiveness as well as the return on investment for stakeholders.

Mauritius attracts tourists and investors from across Africa thanks to its open visa policy. Of the 36 countries studied by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Mauritius is in the top ten. A steady increase in the number of visitors from the Southern Africa Development Community and from the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa attests to this fact.

However, "there is still some room for improvement in terms of attracting tourists from African countries given the attraction of more accessible tourist destinations", the CEO of AHRIM said. Visa procedures, for example, often hinder the free movement of Africans.

For its part, the International Air Transport Association forecasts an annual growth of 5.7% in air traffic for the African region by 2035. This could potentially lead to an increase in the number of jobs in the aviation and tourism sectors in years to come.

During their stay, African tourists are particularly fond of cultural and discovery tourism. They favor shopping and taking advantage of the occasion to discover numerous tourist destinations. Many businessmen and representatives of organizations are also to be found among this clientele and they may require specific services such as the organization of seminars.

In terms of food and beverages, the Beachcomber Hotels and Resorts group says that it is adapting to this clientele by offering varied menus which may include halal meat - a requirement of visitors from North Africa. Ramesh Mawood, noted, however, the small number of families among this clientele, the main reason being "the considerable cost" of airline tickets. This is the same factor which limits demand for four-star and five-star services.

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