

THE AFRICA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION CONGRESS IN TANZANIA



Africa is a continent for which tourism plays a vital role. The industry is quickly developing here but the countries are still not fully exploiting their tourism potential. At the end of May some 300 tourism industry experts from Africa, the U.S., Canada, Europe and Asia came to Tanzania to discuss this as well as other issues. They came to take part in the Africa Travel Association's 33rd Annual Congress that dealt with Africa's competitive advantage in tourism. The Africa Travel Association (ATA) is a travel industry trade association promoting tourism to Africa and intra-Africa travel and partnership since the year 1975. Among members of the association are ministries of tourism and culture, airlines, tourism boards, travel agents, hoteliers, tour operators, travel trade media, PR firms, NGO's as well as SMEs.

This year's congress took place in Arusha International Conference Center (AICC) in Tanzanian "Safari Capital" Arusha. The congress was opened by Tanzanian president Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, who pointed out the importance of the tourism industry for promoting socio-economic development across the continent. According to the president, Africa's tourism industry is still immature. He said there were vast tourism resources available in Africa but that the nations were using only tiny fraction of the tourism potential they represent. In his opinion, Africa needs to tap this potential and use it to overcome poverty and increase prosperity.

Tanzanians emphasize the importance of conservation and promote responsible tourism that should help to minimize negative impact of the tourism sector. Hon. Shamsa Selengia Mwangunga, Tanzania's Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism claims they believe in sustainable development of tourism. The minister also says they promote PPP and involve local communities in the managing of natural resources and tourism development. The tourism industry is becoming increasingly important for Tanzania as it is predicted to generate approximately \$1 billion this year.

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