

# **Africa Travel Association Announces Impact of 36th Annual Congress on Africa's Tourism Industry**

By: Sharon Roling

The Africa Travel Association, a world leader in promoting tourism to Africa, announced major industry milestones at the travel trade association's 36th Annual World Congress in Senegal. ATA's hallmark event brings together tourism leaders and professionals from around the world to shape Africa's growing travel industry.

"ATA is incredibly pleased with the outcomes of the congress and is confident they will have a positive impact on the tourism industry in Senegal and across Africa," said Edward Bergman, ATA Executive Director. "These achievements are an integral part of the story of the growing importance of the industry in Africa and we expect they will encourage a spike in the number of arrivals to and investments in Africa's emerging and well-known destinations."

Under the banner "Destination Senegal: A Tourism Gateway Inspired by Culture, Heritage and Arts," the event was hosted by the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, Liaison with the Private Sector and Small Businesses, in cooperation with the Senegalese Tourism Authority. South African Airways served as the presenting sponsor.

Delegates included six tourism ministers (Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone), the African Union Commissioner responsible for tourism, 16 tourism ministry representatives, approximately 200 tourism leaders and professionals, businesses and non-governmental organization participants, students, and travel trade media. Delegates came from more than 30 countries.

## **ATA Congress Milestones**

Congress milestones include the following:

- ATA and the National Tour Association (NTA), the leading business-building association for travel professionals interested in the North American market-inbound, outbound and within the continent, renewed their commitment to work together to promote travel and tourism to Africa by signing a new memorandum of understanding.

- Dr. Yaw Nyarko, Director of New York University's Africa House, announced the forthcoming release of the second edition of State of Tourism in Africa, prepared by Africa House-New York University, the World Bank and ATA. The report, which uses facts, figures and stories to show the potential and impact of tourism across Africa, will be officially released at ATA's upcoming Presidential Forum on Africa Tourism in September, parallel to the meetings of the United Nations General Assembly.

Citing UNWTO data, among other international sources such as WTTC, China Tourism Academy, World Economic Forum, and Expedia, Inc., the report presents the preliminary finding that Africa's tourism arrivals grew from 37 million in 2003 to 63 million in 2010 and that arrivals to Africa continued to grow at a higher rate than overall arrivals in the world in 2010. In addition, according to China Tourism Academy, Africa received 730,000 visitors from China in 2010, making it the smallest, but fastest growing continental destination with a growth rate of 90% in comparison to 2009.

- ATA hosted the largest delegation of students and young professionals to date with over 20 participants from more than 5 countries.
- The Republic of Chad joined ATA as a member country.

### **Program Highlights**

Senegalese Prime Minister Hon. Souleymane Ndéné Ndiaye opened the event, which took place at Le Méridien President. "The Government of Senegal is pleased to partner with the Africa Travel Association to strengthen Africa's travel and tourism industry," the Prime Minister said, adding, "I hope this Congress marks the dawn of a new era in promoting Destination Senegal in the global marketplace and advancing Africa's travel and tourism industry."

The Prime Minister was joined by Minister of Tourism and Culture of The Gambia and ATA President Hon. Fatou Mas Jobe Njie. In her remarks, the Minister emphasized the importance of regional and sub-regional cooperation. "We cannot promote tourism in an isolated and self centered way in the same way we cannot talk of national development without linking it to bilateral and multilateral cooperation between states or institutions."

ATA hosted a roundtable for tourism ministers on the second day of the congress. The discussion focused on current challenges and future prospects for the industry, building on the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the African Union Commission and ATA. Participating ministers included Hon. Minister Thierno Lo, Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, Liaison with the Private

Sector & Small Businesses, Senegal; Hon. Fatou Mas Jobe Njie, Minister of Tourism and Culture, The Gambia, President, Africa Travel Association; Hon. Minister Akua Sena Dansua, Ministry of Tourism, Republic of Ghana; Hon. Minister Aissa Bright, Assistant Minister of Tourism, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Republic of Liberia; and Hon. Victoria Sylvia Saidu-Kamara, Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs of the Republic of Sierra Leone. Dr. Elham M.A. Ibrahim, AUC Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy, also participated.

The four-day networking and learning event engaged delegates in discussions on a range of industry topics, such as new product development and brand positioning, culinary tourism, airlift to Africa, hotels, online marketing, responsible tourism, public-private partnership, advertising, tourism development levels, and trans-Atlantic communication with tour operators. The program also included a special reception co-hosted by The Gambia ATA Chapter, under the auspices of ATA President Hon. Fatou Mas Jobe Njie and Le Méridien President.

Speakers at the congress included representatives from Advancing Tourism to Africa (ATTA), Africa Consult Group-Production Travel & Tours, the African Union Commission, Amadeus, Arik Air, The Bradford Group, Expedia, Fuel Outdoor, National Tour Association (NTA), Passport Health, South African Airways, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, among many others.

At the closing gala, ATA announced the 2011 recipients of ATA's annual congress awards, which recognize companies and individuals for their leadership in promoting tourism to Africa. ATA's highest achievement, the Founder's Award, was presented to Ronald Mracky of the Africa Consult Group. The recipients of the Outstanding Service awards were Senegal's Tourism Minister Hon. Thierno Lo, Senegal's Director General of the Senegalese Tourism Authority, Ibrahima Sarr, the Senegal Tourist Authority in the USA, and South African Airways. Hon. Fatou Mas Jobe Njie received the Outstanding Leadership award; Salif Badiane of Africa Connection Tours and Mariama Ludovic de Lys of West Africa Tours received the Development of Responsible Tourism in Africa award. The Diaspora Tourism Leadership award was presented to Ogo Sow and Robert Washington received the Young Professionals Leadership award.

### **Showcasing New Attractions in Senegal**

During the congress, ATA and Senegal worked together to expose the delegates to Senegal's new industry events and travel products. To begin, ATA delegates joined hundreds of Senegalese and West African travel professionals and

consumers at TICAA (The International Tourism, Cultural Industries and Artistic Crafts Fair). The fair, held annually in Dakar in May, brings together travel-trade professionals working in the Africa tourism industry to develop business opportunities, tourism products, and strengthen markets for tourism in Africa. Senegal's government has also invested heavily in developing new culture and heritage attractions, most notably the Africa Renaissance Monument, which rivals the size and scope of New York's Statue of Liberty and France's Eiffel Tower. This giant copper sculpture of a family was inaugurated by President Abdoulaye Wade to mark the 50th anniversary of the country's independence in April 2010.

On Host Country Day, ATA delegates visited the monument. Delegates also visited Goree Island, a destination memorializing the trans-Atlantic slave trade, where they were hosted by the Mayor of Dakar, Khalifa Ababacar Sall. The delegates wrapped up the day at a tree-planting ceremony at Cheikh Anta Diop University, where they planted more than a dozen trees. ATA's carbon neutral tradition began last year in The Gambia at ATA's 35th Congress.

At the end of the congress, delegates, alongside thousands of fans, attended a Senegalese wrestling match at Demba Diop Stadium in Dakar. Today, wrestling is Senegal's national sport and a multi-million dollar game that attracts more fans than any other sport in the country.

In addition to SAA, congress sponsors included the Senegalese Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, Liaison with the Private Sector and Small Businesses. New Focus Travel Magazine, E-Turbo News, and Travel World News were media partners with support from Afrique Expansion. The Gambia ATA Chapter, Le Méridien President, Mayor of Dakar, Khalifa Ababacar Sall, and Africa Connection Tours, Inc. were also sponsors.

Africa Travel Association, [www.africatravelassociation.org](http://www.africatravelassociation.org);

Senegal, [www.senegal-tourism.com](http://www.senegal-tourism.com)

