

The Africa Travel Association (ATA) hosted its fifth annual U.S.-Africa Tourism Seminar, the leading U.S.-Africa tourism event in the USA for the travel industry, in Washington D.C. on March 16. The day-long event focused on new strategies to increase arrivals, tourism revenues, and tourism partnerships between the U.S. and Africa marketplaces. In her remarks, ATA President, Honorable Fatou Mas Jobe-Njie, Minister of Tourism & Culture of The Gambia, called on all attending African diplomatic representatives to work with ATA to promote and advance Destination Africa.

“ATA has connected us with key industry leaders and provided us with the tools to overcome the challenges Africa faces as a continental destination. It’s up to us now to take action and work together to increase tourism arrivals and revenue to our continent,” said Honorable Jobe-Njie.

In the keynote address, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Dr. Reuben E. Brigety, II, Bureau of African Affairs, US Department of State, spoke about the importance of investing in the growth of Africa’s economic development and in engaging the U.S. private sector in the process. “Strong, growing economies help stabilize democracies, promote peace, and improve social and health conditions,” Dr. Brigety said. “Many countries in Africa are transitioning into a new phase of economic opportunity that, if managed well, could solidly launch individual economies on a path towards prosperity and peace, and open up new areas for U.S. business.”



At the opening plenary, Edward Bergman, ATA Executive Director, reflected on the current climate for tourism promotion to Africa from the U.S. He said, “With President Barack Obama’s announcement on the role tourism can play in driving economic growth and job creation in the USA, and Africa’s continued growth as a travel destination of choice among US travelers, the momentum of the tourism industry as an economic driver, and the pace of U.S. travel to Africa are clear.” He said, “The knowledge of the power of tourism as an economic driver exists and the demand for product and service in Africa is there, which is where ATA has a critical role to play by ensuring that the supply meets the demand.”

The Gambian tourism minister, Dr. Brigety and Mr. Bergman were joined at the opening session by Peter Tichansky, President and CEO of the Business Council for International Understanding (BCIU) and Steven Hayes, President of the Corporate Council on Africa, as well as John Golicz, CEO of UNICOMM—Travel & Adventure Show®.

Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Tourism ministers from The Gambia and Cameroon also participated. A record 150 participants attended the event.

Ambassador Amina Ali, African Union Permanent Representative to the USA, who also participated in the opening, highlighted Africa's impressive economic performance over the last decade and future potential, yet she noted, "Africa's economic growth could have been even more pronounced and impressive if it had vigorously harnessed its inherent tourism potential. The world tourism industry is booming and tourism, to quote the recent Brenthurst Foundation discussion paper, tourism has gone global in the 21st century, no continent stands to benefit more from the 21st century tourism boom than Africa notwithstanding global economic crisis."

The 2012 event attracted the highest number of African country representatives to date. Almost twenty countries were present, including: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Tourism ministers from The Gambia and Cameroon also participated. A record 150 participants attended the event.

For the second year, the seminar was organized in cooperation with the African Union Mission to the USA. For the fourth year, the Washington, DC Travel & Adventure Show® co-sponsored the event. South African Airways served as presenting sponsor. Additional sponsors included Arik Air, Delta Airlines, Egyptian Tourist Authority, South African Tourism and Zimbabwe Tourism Authority. The ATA Mid-Atlantic Chapter provided support.

Highlights from presentations by participants included the following:

- Hon. Bello Bouba Maigari, Minister of State, Ministry of Tourism and Leisure, spoke about the central role of the U.S. tourism market for Cameroon, noting that an increasing number of Americans are visiting Cameroon "in search of their roots." He said Cameroon is planning to develop the Bimbia slave port into a heritage site in order to increase tourist arrivals to the "1 million mark," with the majority of visitors coming from the U.S.
- Ron Erdmann, Deputy Director of the Office of Travel and Tourism Industries at the U.S. Department of Commerce, provided insight into the performance of the U.S. outbound tourism market. "In 2009, Africa set a new record for the most U.S. travelers visiting the continent; however, in 2010 US travel to Africa declined by 9 percent." He added, "To understand the full story, pay attention to U.S. visitor spending. Yes, there are fewer travelers, but the travelers are spending more." He further added that the highest percentage of U.S. visits to Africa come from the South Atlantic and the Middle Atlantic regions and that the majority are visiting small towns, the country side, national parks, and ethnic heritage sites.
- Dr. Hannah Messerli of The World Bank, with support from Martine Bakker of New York University, presented the latest global intelligence related to tourism performance across Africa. In the two decades from 1990-2010, tourism to Africa has grown at a faster rate than the rest of the world in terms of international arrivals. However, Africa's market share has remained low, growing from 4 percent to 7 percent. Regionally, tourism is strongest in Southern and East Africa. Though Southern Africa receives slightly more overnight visitors than East Africa, East Africa leads Southern Africa in long-haul tourism,

or visitors who originate outside of Africa. Gaiv Tata, Director of Africa, Finance and Private Sector Development at the World Bank, moderated a discussion among Arik Air, Delta Airlines and South African Airways that focused on Africa's competitiveness as a tourism destination. The session gave ATA member airlines an opportunity to address challenges facing Africa's airline industry and to present possible solutions, paying special attention to safety and security, air traffic liberalization and priorities of African and foreign-based airlines.

- The National Tour Association (NTA) brought North American industry specialists from Academic Travel Abroad, American Society of Travel Agents, Destination Marketing International, together with Africa's tourism representatives from Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Tanzania and Zimbabwe to explore the ingredients for promoting a successful African destination to the North American marketplace.
- Karen Hoffman, ATA Vice President The Bradford Group President, facilitated a discussion among U.S. travel specialists, including Affluent Hospitality, Group IST and Henderson Travel, on how Africa is promoted to clients and prospects, what the consumers are looking for, and emerging trends and niche markets.
- CDC Development Solutions, represented by Deirdre White, CEO and President led a discussion with representatives from Expedia, the Isenberg Group and Trip Advisor, who shared how organizations of different sizes use and leverage technology and social media to market their services in the e-tourism global market place.
- EJ Hogendoorn, International Crisis Group Horn of Africa Project Director spoke about how conflict affects the tourism industry. Craig Sholley, African Wildlife Foundation, Vice President for Philanthropy and Marketing, presented AWF's experience with conservation and community engagement. Dr. Nancy Scanlon of the Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management, Florida International University, chaired the session.
- Andrea Papitto, Thinking Forward Media Managing Director, highlighted the role the African Diaspora can play in tourism promotion in Africa. Chef Pierre Thiam spoke focused on Africa's culinary products and Ogo Sow spoke about how a new West Africa Tourism Radio program markets Africa's tourism products to new audiences in Africa and the USA.

For more information, visit www.AfricanTravelAssociation.org.