



Africa Travel Association Congress in Gambia ends with pledge to build new partnerships for tourism development

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By Millicent Njeri / Press Release



The Africa Travel Association's 35th Annual Congress ended on May 20 with a commitment among Africa's tourism stakeholders to boost efforts to develop new public-private partnerships devoted to advocating for and developing the tourism industry in Africa. Honorable Fatou Mass Jobe-Njie, the Gambia Minister of Tourism and Culture and incoming ATA president, closed the event that was attended by more than 300 participants, as well as press

from Africa, Europe, and North America.

In her closing remarks, the Minister highlighted the importance of tourism as an engine for economic growth and prosperity. She also said, "This may mark the end of a successful event, but it also marks the beginning of our joint efforts to work in partnership with the public and private sector to promote the travel and tourism industry to and within Africa. The Gambia was a proud host of this event and hopes that our infectious spirit will inspire other countries and tourism stakeholders to action."

At the meeting, ATA announced a number of milestones for making a strong case for increased investment in the tourism industry. "ATA members and friends and supporters

have shown that we are truly committed to promoting tourism to Africa as a means to promoting socio-economic development," said Edward Bergman, ATA executive director. "I know that when we return to our home countries, we will continue to work in partnership with tourism stakeholders in the public and private sectors to promote the industry and inspire others to follow our example."

Congress milestones include the following:

- * The announcement of the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Africa Union and ATA. The MOU, which was signed by Honorable Shamsa Mwangunga, outgoing ATA president, Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism of the United Republic of Tanzania, and Dr. Elham M.A. Ibrahim, Africa Union Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy, declares that the two organizations will undertake a commitment to develop collaboration in the area of travel and tourism promotion.

- * The launch of a joint effort by New York University's Africa House, the World Bank, and ATA to make a case for developing Africa's tourism industry with the preparation of the joint publication *The State of Tourism in Africa*. Using facts, figures, and stories, the report paints a picture of the current and potential impact of tourism on both a country's and a region's development strategy. The report also advocates for increased attention and resource allocation from national governments to the tourism industry.

- * During the industry workshops and networking events, ATA and UNWTO engaged in discussions on how the two global organizations would pursue collaboration and cooperation in the areas of travel and tourism development in Africa in the future.

- * The Gambia Organizing Committee announced its commitment to hosting the first "Carbon Off-Set Free" ATA congress. In addition to planting seedlings to grow an "ATA Forest" at the GIG Forest, the committee limited the "carbon footprint" of the congress by ordering produce from the award-winning project Gambia is Good (GIG). GIG sources all its produce from local producers.

As a sign of his commitment to developing the Gambia's tourism industry, the President of The Republic of the Gambia, Sheikh Professor Dr. Alhaji Yaya A. J. J. Jammeh, hosted the delegates at a number of special events, including a visit to his home village, Kanilai, and a gala dinner and evening of entertainment at the Sheraton Hotel Spa and Resort.

In what has become an ATA congress tradition over the last few years, Shamsa Mwangunga (MP), ATA president and Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism of the United Republic of Tanzania hosted a special evening of dinner and dancing held at the five-star Ocean Bay Hotel.

On the first of two Host Country days, delegates visited James Island and Juffureh. James Island is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site and was a base of transportation of

slaves from the Gambia to other parts of the world. At James Island, delegates participated in a special memorial, in which they floated flower wreaths down the River Gambia and stood in a moment of silence. Delegates were also asked to consider making a donation for the restoration of the jetty to James Island. The project was organized in cooperation with US Ambassador Barry Wells.

Following the day-long visit to James Island and Juffreh, the delegates enjoyed a special cocktail reception at the luxury hotel, Coco Ocean Resort and Spa. The evening event was co-hosted by the US Ambassador to the Gambia, Honorable Barry Wells.

Under the banner "Discover Africa's Genuine Warmth," the ATA-Gambia event brought together tourism ministers and more than 300 travel industry professionals from across Africa, Europe, and North America for four days to explore the latest issues facing the travel trade industry, learn about "Destination Gambia," and advocate for increased resources to the tourism industry.

During the congress, delegates explored the following industry topics: Sustainable Tourism in The Gambia, Innovative and Interactive Marketing, Niche Markets and Emerging Trends, Standards in the Hotel Market in Africa, Connecting the Africa Diaspora to Destination Africa, and Hospitality and Tourism Education in Africa. Special sessions were held on tourism and development, advocating for tourism resources, and partnerships with airlines serving Africa.

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