

## Gambia braces up for ATA 2010 congress

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**The Gambia, widely known as the Smiling Coast of Africa has been chosen among several countries in Africa to host the Africa Travel Association 2010 congress, slated for May this year.**

This international event is expected to be attended by African tourism ministers and industry experts representing tourism boards, travel agencies, ground operator companies, airlines, and hotels. Many participants from the travel industry, media and the corporate, non profit organisations and academics are also expected to attend.

The four-day event, according to the information gathered by this columnist will engage delegates in discussions on a range of relevant topics, such as public-private sector partnership, marketing and promotion, tourism infrastructure development, industry trends, and social media. As part of the event, the ATA member countries will also organize a few evening networking reception and ATA's Young Professionals Network will meet with local hospitality professionals and students. For the second year, the congress will include a marketplace for buyers and sellers specializing in Destination Africa. Delegates will also have the opportunity to explore the country on pre or post congress trips, as well as on the Host Country Day.

In recent times, The Gambia has made an amazing progress in the travel and tourism industry by building public and private-sector partnerships, an ambience created by government. By combining The Gambia's ability to attract tourist arrivals - particularly from Europe - with ATA's ability to engage diverse travel professionals from around the world, particularly in North America and across Africa, it is expected that the congress will hold tremendous promise for turning tourism into a continental economic driver.

The Gambia, a small country in Africa is famous for its luxurious beach resorts, quaint fishing villages and magnificent coastline, but there is much more to the affordable and safe West African country, including peaceful and friendly people, eco-tourism, sports fishing, bird watching and safaris, music, dancing and traditional wrestling matches, and visiting trans-Atlantic slave trade sites. It has an estimated population of 1,600,000. With the exception of a small shoreline, the English-speaking country is surrounded by Senegal. Approximately 120,000 charter tourists, mainly from Europe, arrive annually.

The tourism ministry under the dynamic leadership of Hon. Nancy Njie plans to attract 500,000 arrivals by 2012, targeting the US marketplace and 'upmarket' tourists, and to lengthen the tourist season to all year-round. Public-private sector plans increase the accommodation stock and to build a conference center which is already underway. The travel and tourism economy

accounts for sixteen percent of the country's GDP.

The 2010 congress builds on the success of the West African country's longstanding ties with ATA. In 1984, ATA held its ninth congress in Banjul, immediately following the association's eighth in Cairo, Egypt.

ATA is excited to return to Gambia and anticipates that the 2010 congress will help the country reach its goal of bringing in more tourists and facilitating further industry investment. To begin preparations for the congress, ATA has sent a delegation in Banjul, in last November for a site inspection. During the visit, the team had the opportunity to meet with representatives from the public and private sectors and ATA-Banjul chapter members. They have also visited the proposed conference, lodging and entertainment venues.

The ATA, 2009 was held Conrad Cairo Hotel in Egypt in May last year, on the theme: "Connecting destination Africa". The event brought together travel specialists and experts to help shape Africa's tourism agenda during the global economic downturn. About the Africa Travel Association (ATA), it was established as an international travel industry trade association in 1975. Its mission is to promote travel, tourism and transport to and within Africa, and to strengthen intra-Africa partnerships. As the world's premier travel industry trade association, ATA provides services to a broad range of members including: tourism, diaspora, culture, and sports ministers, tourism boards, airlines, hoteliers, travel agents, tour operators, travel trade media, public relations firms, consulting companies, non-profit organizations, businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises, and other organizations engaged in tourism promotion.

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