

# JAXFAX<sup>®</sup> Travel Marketing MAGAZINE

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*The Travel Agents' Path to Profits*

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## ATA Congress Connects Africa

By Mercedes M. Cardona

**D**espite the global recession, travel suppliers and agents need to hone their focus on Africa beyond selling safaris, since the market holds great potential for growth and is still largely untapped, said speakers at the Africa Travel Association's (ATA) annual meeting.

The conference, titled "Connecting Destination Africa" brought together tour operators, travel agents and tourism officials from Africa and the U.S. to encourage them to work together.

"Perhaps now more than ever, bringing the world to Africa and Africa to the world requires partnerships," said ATA president **Shamsa Mwangunga**, the Tanzanian minister for natural resources and tourism.

While most U.S. travelers associate African tourism with safaris, Africa is gaining attention in other travel segments, such as cultural and religious travel. Some U.S. tour operators now offer packages that focus on Biblical or historic sites related to the slave trade in the Americas. Many countries are developing sun and beach resorts and wellness, sports and adventure tourism.

"Africa has a very rich tapestry...we need to know what is African tourism," said Amb. Daudi Mwakawago, former representative of Tanzania to the U.N. and an ATA board member.

"It's not all animals and safari," said David Omboga, owner of Jaguar Tours in Kenya. "You need to get to the tour operators."

This recession that has arrived at a time when U.S. tourism to Africa is growing would be the wrong time to retreat, said speakers. "The kind of Americans you want ... they're still traveling," said destination management consultant Sarah Mann. Travelers who are interested in the environment and learning about other cultures "are as excited about Africa as ever," said Mann, a partner in **Case & Mann Consulting**.

While Africa accounted for only 7% of U.S. outbound traffic in 2007 the 874,000 U.S. travelers to Africa represented a 73% increase year-over-year— even as the country slid into recession, Mann noted. More importantly, she quoted a survey by the U.S. International Trade Administration that showed 50% of those travelers use travel agents, the same rate as in 2001. Also, package use is up slightly to 16% from 14% of travelers, probably due to the increase in special-interest travel, Mann said.

She noted the survey showed a growth in small-town visits to 53% from 48% in 2001, and a sharp increase in ethnic heritage tours, to 34% from 20%. "Your customers are not the mass market," she said.

Lisa Simon, president of the **National Tour Association**, encouraged African suppliers to tap into U.S. associations to reach the market. She offered all ATA members complimentary registration for NTA's upcoming conference in Reno Nov. 14-18.

Simon suggested promoting Africa, even to U.S. tour operators that don't specialize in it. "They can see the demand, but need the information to steer clients there" she added.

Congress speakers and attendees agreed infrastructure and image remain two barriers that must be overcome, especially in the U.S. market.

There has been progress recently, as some of the region's largest airlines revamp their networks—both **EgyptAir** and **South**



From left: Hisham Zaazou, First Assistant to the Minister, Ministry of Tourism, Egypt; Hon. Shamsa S. Mwangunga, Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism, Tanzania and ATA President; Amr El Ezaby, Chairman, Egyptian Tourist Authority; Edward Bergiman, ATA Executive Director; and Mohamed Hegazy, Deputy Director Tourism, Egyptian Tourist Office, US/Latin America.

**African Airways** are developing hubs in Cairo and Johannesburg, respectively, but moving travelers around Africa is a challenge that countries have to face together, said delegates.

Amr El Azaby, chairman of the **Egyptian Tourist Authority**, compared the ease of moving within the European Union by car, train and even bicycles with the difficulties travelers face in getting from one African country to another. "That trouble discourages visitors... Africa is not connected. There are no roads nor trains between our countries," he said.

Passengers who are coming from far away want to experience more than one country in Africa, so a tour operator that can offer multi-country itineraries would have an advantage, said Patricia Brown, of **KTI Express Travel** in Sierra Leone.

Image development is a trickier issue. News reports of civil strife are obvious minuses for a country's marketing and can linger in the public's mind. Ombogo, president of ATA's Kenya chapter, said the country is only now recovering the travel business lost when violence broke out during last year's election.

"Africa has a challenge to fight a stereotype of a continent of strife and poverty. We have a challenge to show the reality," said **Tadelech Dalecho**, Ethiopian minister of culture and tourism.

But attendees noted the paradox that while tourism contributes heavily to many countries' GDP and is a force for stability, many governments are loath to spend on it.

**Dr. Yaw Nyarko**, director of **New York University's Africa House**, encouraged the delegates to take the statistics they gathered during the conference and use them to pressure their governments to pour more resources into tourism development.

For more information, contact the **Egyptian Tourist Authority**, 212-332-2570; visit [www.egypttravel.com](http://www.egypttravel.com).

For ATA Congress, visit [www.africatravelassociation.org](http://www.africatravelassociation.org)

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