

Africa Travel Association Celebrates 34th Annual Congress in Egypt

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The Sphinx at Giza

As Greek historian **Pliny the Elder** observed more than 2,300 years ago, there is always something new out of [Africa](#). The Africa Travel Association (ATA), in cooperation with the **Egyptian Ministry of Tourism** and the **Egyptian Tourism Authority (ETA)** celebrated its 34th Annual Congress May 17-21, 2009 in **Egypt**. More than 300 delegates, including tourism ministers and industry experts from **Africa**, **North America**, [Europe](#), the [Middle East](#) and **Asia** gathered in Egypt's Nile-side capital, **Cairo**. Themed "Connecting Destination Africa," the agenda at venue **Conrad Cairo** hotel addressed the growth of and challenges facing Africa's tourism industry. And there's still plenty of news.

The biggest headline is ATA's expansion as a catalyst for marketing and branding the continent as a whole, along with each country as a unique travel destination. How? By presenting Africa and its 53 nations as actively engaging in the global tourism marketplace— and ripe for investment and business exploration.



Paulino Baptista, Angolan Deputy Minister of Hotels and Tourism; Bello Gada, Nigerian Minister of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation; Shamsa Mwangunga, Tanzanian Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism; Hisham Zazzou, First Assistant to the Minister, Egyptian Ministry of Tourism; Edward Bergman, ATA Executive Director; Tadelech Dalecho, Ethiopian State Minister of Culture and Tourism; Amr El-Ezaby, Chairman, Egyptian Tourist Authority and Mohamed Hegazy, Deputy Director, Egyptian Tourist Authority USA and Latin America

Out of Egypt

ETA Chairman Amr El Ezaby stressed continued promotion of Africa's myriad tourism products, saying, "Until 20 or 30 years ago, Egypt was a one-product destination: the Classic Egypt tour. But in the 1980s we started diversifying in order to keep our competitive edge, by developing resort, desert and cultural tourism...demand increased, as did infrastructure, from 18,000 rooms in 1982 to 210,000 rooms in 2008." Despite well publicized setbacks over the years, Egypt's been very successful at mass tourism development.

Today, it's swinging back to the original "Egypt a la luxe," and high-end resort growth is targeting a bigger share of the luxury market. Combining multi-attraction tourism with five-star properties along the Red Sea and Mediterranean coast to the west of Alexandria has enhanced Egypt's reputation as a beach and premier dive destination. A 17 percent tourism growth worldwide in arrivals in 2008 (topping 12.8 million visitors; 319,112 from the U.S.)— despite the current global economic climate— reflects this strategy's success.

Edward Bergman, ATA executive director, noting opportunities to forge public-private sector promotion linkages, said, "ATA is thrilled to be joined by so many distinguished industry leaders, who've all brought their unique experiences and expertise here to address key issues facing Africa's emerging tourism industry today."

Out of Africa

Tourism's positive affect on Africa's economic ecosystem was a recurring theme. Hon. Shamsa Mwangunga (MP), ATA president and Tanzania's Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism, spotlighted its role as an economic development driver, "particularly in the areas of poverty reduction and peace promotion... the most peaceful countries are experiencing a steady increase in tourism arrival receipts."

From the enduring appeal of safaris to newly-crafted [tours visiting President Obama's ancestral home in Kenya](#) to the African Diaspora Heritage Trail Conference in Tanzania in October, or the African fashion as cultural heritage, sessions provided an overview of Africa's rich cultural products and its current and future marketplace.

Business opportunities remain abundant cross-continent. “Opportunities for Africa with **FIFA 2010 World Cup**” covered sports tourism’s potential for stimulating economic growth beyond [SouthAfrica](#)’s soccer stadiums. **Ray Whelan** of **MATCH**, the service company appointed by FIFA to handle event logistics, urged leveraging unique, short- and long-term opportunities available for generating cross-continent and industry growth. “Hotel Market Trends” featured panelists from the **Sheraton Addis, Ethiopia**; **CHI Hotels and Resorts, Malta**; and **Movenpick Media City**, which focused on successful formats used in Africa to introduce existing products to new markets via creative distribution channels and geographic sources.

“The Present & Future of Air Access To & Within Africa” targeted the continent’s underdeveloped air network and challenges airlines face that affect tourism growth (.g., profitability, and the need for outside-the-box thinking to foster inter-country synergy). Participants **Egypt Air** and **South African Airways** detailed plans to expand their intra-African and international networks. (Note: Egypt’s spanking new, world-class international **Terminal 3** opened at **Cairo Airport** at the end of April. On June 2, Egypt Air launched connecting service via **United Airlines** through **San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago** and **Washington D.C.** South African Airways recently launched [U.S. service from JFK](#) with morning [Johannesburg](#) arrival.)

Out of Challenges

Because crisis management is something Destination Africa deals with on a regular basis, creative and more effective solutions are emerging. The “New Media” session explored technology’s vast potential for the youth market, primarily via the Internet and the use of social networking sites, such as **Facebook**, **YouTube**, **Twitter**, and blogging for product (i.e., destination) placement by industry suppliers and tourist authorities. Long-term, onsite visibility provides a powerful tool for travel agents— while this younger generation might not consult them yet, Africa in particular is the kind of trip requiring more professional advice, and eventually they’ll be more willing to engage an agent to help them plan.



Attendees of the Congress take a group photo at the Pyramids

Out to Dinner

Tanzania Tourist Board’s (TTB) ninth Annual Tourism Awards were presented by tourism minister **Mwangunga** during TTB’s President’s Dinner. This year’s honorees are: **African Dream Safaris**; **Thomson Safaris**; **African Mecca Safaris**; **Safari Ventures**; **Lion World Tours**; **Asante Safaris**; **South African Airways**; **Egypt Air**; **Ann Curry, NBC-TV** and **Eloise Parker, New York Daily News**. The Congress Host Day featured a visit to the **Egyptian National Museum**, the **Giza Pyramids**, the **Khan El-Khalili market** and a gala **Nile River** dinner cruise.

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