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Africa Travel Association announces 2010 World Congress

Honorable **Nancy Seedy Njie**, The Gambia's Minister of Tourism and Culture, and **Edward Bergman**, Executive Director of the **Africa Travel Association** (ATA), announced that the Republic of The Gambia will host ATA's 35th Annual Congress in the capital city of Banjul in May 2010.

"It is with great pride that we are once again partnering with ATA to invite the world to visit and explore The Gambia," said Minister Njie. *"The Gambian government places great priority on tourism, which has contributed significantly to our country's growth and stability. We hope that the ATA Congress will help us continue to promote our country in new marketplaces and attract new investment in the sector."*

The Gambia, known as the "Smiling Coast of 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.

"The Gambia has made amazing progress with its travel and tourism industry by building public and private -sector partnerships, where the government creates the conditions for the private sector to invest in the industry," said Bergman. *"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, the congress holds tremendous promise for turning tourism into a continental economic driver."*

ATA's hallmark international event will 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 trade media and the corporate, non profit and academic sectors are also expected to attend.

The four-day event will engage delegates in discussions on a range of industry topics, such as public-private sector partnership, marketing and promotion, tourism infrastructure development, industry trends, and social media. ATA member countries will organize a few evening networking receptions and ATA's Young Professionals Network will meet with local hospitality professionals and students. For the second year, the congress will also 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.

The Gambia, the smallest country on the African continent, 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 Ministry plans to attract 500,000 arrivals by 2012, by targeting the US marketplace and "up-market" tourists, and to lengthen the tourist season to all year round. Public-private sector plans to increase the accommodation stock and to build a conference center are currently underway. The travel and tourism economy accounts for sixteen percent of Gambia'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 congress in Cairo, Egypt.

"ATA is excited to return to Gambia and anticipates that the 2010 congress will help Gambia reach its goal of bringing in more tourists and industry investment," said Bergman. *"We are especially grateful to our private sector partners, particularly Starwood Hotels, who have been instrumental in bringing the Ministry and ATA together to organize this important continental event."*

To prepare for the annual event, ATA will send a delegation to Banjul in November for a site inspection. During the visit, the team will meet with representatives from the public and private sectors and ATA-Banjul chapter members, as well as visit the proposed conference, lodging and entertainment venues.

ATA, in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and the Egyptian Tourism Authority (ETA), organized the 2009 congress at the Conrad Cairo Hotel in Egypt in May 2009. Under the banner "Connecting Destination Africa," the event brought travel specialists and experts to Egypt to help shape Africa's tourism agenda during the global economic downturn. EgyptAir served as the official congress carrier. *Theodore Koumelis - Tuesday, August 11, 2009*