

SA tourism thrives with 51.8% increase in international arrivals

Statistics South Africa's recent release of international arrival figures for January to November 2023, shows the South African tourism sector's rising momentum. International tourist arrivals totalled 7.6 million representing a remarkable 51.8% increase when compared with same period in 2022. While recovery towards pre-Covid-19 numbers is encouraging, this performance is 17.6% lower compared to the same period in 2019.



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"The numbers show that the tourism sector is successfully driving travel to South Africa while shaping cultural exchanges and contributing to inclusive economic growth.

Africa continues to lead the way

During the first eleven months of 2023, South Africa welcomed 5.8 million visitors from the rest of the African continent marking a significant 75.5% of all arrivals, compared to the same period in 2022. Within the African region, Zimbabwe and Kenya stood out for their remarkable growth. Zimbabwe saw an exceptional 77,5% increase in tourist arrivals, totalling 1.9 million, while Kenya recorded a 94,2% surge, reaching 37,414 arrivals for January to November 2023 compared to the same period last year.

"I am so pleased by these numbers from the rest of the African continent. We view the region as significant. Kenya's remarkable performance can be attributed to the strategic decision by government to simplify the visa regime earlier this year as well as targeted and effective insights-driven marketing campaigns.

"Overall, through focused marketing, various collaborations and leveraging various strategic opportunities by The Department of Tourism, South African Tourism and the broader tourism sector, we have been able to achieve these very impressive results on the continent," says Patricia De Lille, Minister of Tourism.

The Americas exhibit strong momentum

Tourist arrivals from the Americas between January and November this year registered at 411,254 reflecting a 44.1% growth compared to the same period in 2022. The United States of America contributed the most, with 320,948 arrivals, marking a 39.5% increase compared to the same period in 2022.

"The US remains a top international source market for South Africa and has been recording robust steady growth in arrivals in 2023. Based on our December projections we anticipate recording our 2019 pre-pandemic arrivals well ahead of the forecasted recovery mooted for the 2024/2025 financial year.

"We are proud of the work done by the team working collaboratively alongside our stakeholders in the public and private sector to deliver exciting consumer and trade-facing projects to drive brand affinity and distribution channel initiatives to reignite this market," adds Minister De Lille.

European markets show strength

With 1.1 million tourist arrivals, Europe contributed to 14.6% of the total arrivals, during the first eleven months of 2023. This marks a 43.2% increase when compared to the same period last year. The United Kingdom remains the top European source market with 315 054 tourists choosing South Africa marking a 30.4% growth. Germany experienced a 47.9% increase in arrivals, amounting to 219,971 tourists.

This was followed by the Netherlands which saw an increase of 48.4% amounting to 117,948 tourist arrivals from this country. Russia exhibited a dramatic growth of 83.9%, contributing 25,116 arrivals.

"Europe continues to show strong growth and recovery when compared to the same period in 2022. Notably, the Netherlands has achieved 90% of 2019 arrivals, solidifying its position as the fourth largest international market behind the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Germany. This recovery can be attributed to consistent efforts to showcase South Africa as a welcoming, responsible tourism destination, highlighting experiences that align with intrepid, green economy-conscious travellers," Minister De Lille adds.

Noteworthy growth from the Asia markets

During the first eleven months of 2023 Asian markets also showed significant growth with a total of 182,497 arrivals from the region representing an astounding 72.6% when compared to the same period last year. In this region, India led the way with 73,037 tourists, a 46.3% growth, closely followed by China, which saw a massive 215.7% surge, amounting to 34,669 arrivals.

"The performance highlights South Africa's charm as well as magnetism as a tourism destination for tourists coming from this region. The rich and varied cultural heritage, historical connections, natural beauty and diversity continue to make our country very attractive to travellers coming from this region.

"The re-opening of the Chinese market and the initiation of direct flight routes have catalysed a resurgence in arrivals,

highlighting the vast potential and significance of this market to South African tourism," Minister De Lille says.

Middle East registers solid gains

The Middle East saw a robust increase with 51,779 arrivals in the January to November 2023 period, a 37.5% growth when compared to the same period in 2022. South Africa received 15,507 arrivals from Saudi Arabia marking an increase of 40.9%. The United Arab Emirates showed a remarkable 114.2% growth, accounting for 6,360 arrivals.

More to be done to unlock even more growth

"It is evident that our country remains attractive and that more can be unlocked with more policy and regulation revisions. I am committed to working with all partners and government colleagues to unlock barriers such as visa regulations, safety concerns and limited air access and air lift, so that we can grow our sector and meaningfully contribute to our country's economy.

"I look forward to continue working with the rest of my colleagues in government in this regard so that we can all attain mutual benefits of our collaborative initiatives. Our country offers unique and undeniable breathtaking landscapes and tourism products and experiences.

"We also thank all the South Africans for their continuous hospitality and extending a warm welcome to all our visitors. Here's to South Africa's sustained charm, attractiveness and relentless tourism growth," concludes Minister De Lille.

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