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**Aviation executives call on tourism boards to boost Africa air routes**

**WINDHOEK, 05 JULY 2024** – Africa's vast tourism potential remains untapped due to a lack of air connectivity, with Africa currently accounting for just 1.9% of global passenger and cargo traffic. However, aviation experts believe national tourism boards have a unique opportunity to drive new airline routes and spur economic growth.

At a recent AviaDev Africa workshop, which was hosted in collaboration with the SADC Business Council Tourism Alliance, airline executives stressed tourism boards' power lies in leveraging market data and industry relationships to convince sceptical carriers of new routes' long-term viability.

“Tourism is more than just leisure; it's a critical economic activity that requires strategic thinking and collaboration across sectors,” said Kojo Bentum-Williams, UN Tourism's Senior Africa Communications Expert.

Sylvain Bosc, former Chief Commercial Officer of SAA and Fastjet, stressed the importance of demonstrating sustained profitability. “Destination marketing organisations (DMOs) must sell a long-term vision highlighting the destination’s growth prospects and economic impact,” he said. “Creative incentives like co-marketing, reducing airline costs, and quantifying passenger volumes can be more powerful than direct subsidies.”

Bosc noted DMOs need to “bring new light” to data airlines already have by offering insights into upcoming local economic developments like new mines or infrastructure projects that could drive corporate traffic. “Local insights can provide airlines with the confidence they need to invest in new routes,” he said.

Natalia Rosa, Project Lead of the SADC Business Council Tourism Alliance, underscored the critical role of aviation in regional development: “Aviation is not a luxury, it's the lifeblood of a modern regional economy. Improved air connectivity unlocks a range of benefits: it streamlines travel, opens doors for new tourism markets, and strengthens regional economic ties.”

Gavin Eccles, Head of Vertical at BAE Ventures, emphasised tourism boards must be “at the table” with compelling cases backed by local market insights, travel trade ties and unique selling points that airlines often lack.

“Tourism boards should not only provide data but also offer a local perspective that airlines may not have,” Eccles said, citing India's successful "Incredible India" branding undermined by poor connectivity.

Regional coordination like aligned visa policies, joint itinerary promotion and tapping conservation funds can also help finance route development. But Tim Harris of Helm Growth Advisors cautioned: “Retaining and expanding existing airline services should be the priority before attracting new routes.”

While direct subsidies face sustainability questions, Bentum-Williams said other incentives enable an “environment of trust” for profit-focused airlines.

“There's a need to change the narrative from just paying airlines to fly routes to creating an environment of trust and confidence,” he said.

Jillian Blackbeard, CEO of Africa’s Eden Tourism Association, highlighted successful collaboration with Proflight through local stakeholder and trade backing, building airline confidence without major incentives.

“We worked closely with Proflight and local stakeholders to ensure that routes were supported by the trade and the private sector, which helped build confidence in the airline and led to successful route development without significant financial incentives,” Blackbeard shared.

Coordinated efforts leveraging DMOs’ destination expertise can unlock increased connectivity - a lifeline for Africa's tourism economies long grounded by poor air links.

The AviaDev Africa workshop was designed as a platform for action to address the challenges of the aviation industry and collaborate on solutions. The intention from the outset was to examine how tourism stakeholders, including national tourism organisations and private sector tourism associations, can become involved in route development and assist airlines with route promotion. The success of the workshop and has now secured it a place at AviaDev 2025 in Zanzibar. Scheduled for the welcome reception day before the main conference, it will equip tourism delegates with essential route development building blocks and comprise two days of networking and collaboration focused on reshaping African aviation's future.

**Ends**

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**About the SADC Business Council Tourism Alliance**

The SADC Business Council Tourism Alliance is a non-profit, membership-based association dedicated to the responsible development of travel and tourism within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. We unite private and public sector tourism stakeholders to drive sustainable economic growth, responsible tourism practices, and regional collaboration. Through advocacy, capacity building, investment promotion, and collaborative marketing initiatives, we work to solidify the SADC region's position as a world-class tourism destination, fostering benefits for all member states. For more information, visit [www.sadctourismalliance.org](http://www.sadctourismalliance.org).