Africa in the Air

Aviation & Tourism Outlook 2026

African Travel and Tourism Association - ATTA®

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Africa in the Air : Aviation & Tourism Outlook 2026

by Ed Robertson

Introduction

AVIATION & TOURISM

Once you combine the vast scale of Africa with the extraordinary diversity of experiences, business opportunities, history and heritage, it becomes clear the most practical and efficient way for tourists, workers and those visiting friends and family to travel to and around the continent – is by air.

And whilst post-Covid tourism numbers took sometime to recover, Africa has been experiencing a resurgence in airlift that is driving levels of growth in tourism numbers that are leaving rival regions in the dust.

This paper explores the rapid resurgence of aviation capacity across Africa and its pivotal role in driving the continent's tourism growth by drawing on data from aviation analysts and global industry bodies, examining the expansion in international airlift, growing demand from key source markets and significant infrastructure investment in emerging hubs.

While the outlook has been highly positive, from both a tourism and aviation perspective, new geopolitical uncertainty means Africa is becoming an increasingly strategic player.

This paper also acknowledges structural challenges that must be addressed to sustain momentum and argues for co-ordinated action between governments, airlines and tourism stakeholders if Africa is to capitalise fully on its growing global appeal and secure long-term aviation and tourism growth.

AFRICAN AVIATION NUMBERS

Current State of the Market

Data shared exclusively with ATTA® by aviation analysts OAG reveals double-digit growth across Africa and specifically in its five biggest aviation markets.

In the first 10 months of 2026, for which data is available, OAG statistics show that there are **182.4 million departure seats** available in Africa, a **13.7% increase** on the 160.4 million available in the same period in 2025 while also double the 6.1% growth seen between the whole of 2024 and 2025.

182.4M

Departure Seats

Available in Africa (Jan–Oct 2026)

13.7%

Year-on-Year Growth

Increase on 2025 figures

18.6%

International Growth

Increase in international seats to 129.5M

Of the 182.4 million seats scheduled to leave airports so far this year, 129.5 million serve the international - out of Africa - market and it is here that the key growth can be seen with an 18.6% increase on available seats compared to the 3.3% increase in domestic - intra-Africa - seats to 52.9 million.

The OAG data also shows that **Egypt** remains the biggest market with 30.9 million departure seats available from January to October 2026, a 12.6% increase on the same period in 2025, while **South Africa's** 26.8 million seats for 2026 represent a 19.6% increase. Third placed **Morocco's** 22.5 million seats are 21.8% more than in 2025 while **Ethiopia** enjoyed growth of 31.2% with 17 million departure seats so far assigned for 2026, followed by **Kenya's** 10.2 million seats which represent an increase of 22.3% this year.

ATTA® AFRICAN TRAVEL & TOURISM ASSOCIATION

GEOPOLITICAL CRISIS

The Middle East Crisis and African Aviation

The new American / Middle East conflict has thrown energy markets into shock and shut down airspace over one of the world's busiest hubs. Whilst the length of the conflict is unclear, the fall-out is likely to be significant and long lasting with insurance premiums and security costs rising whilst traditional aviation corridors are disrupted.

Africa's geographic position is likely to become more important. Global East and Southern African hubs offer alternative routing flexibility between Asia, Europe and the Americas.

> Kgomotso Ramothea says: “As airlines reassess corridor resilience, Africa’s expanding hubs offer both short-term and long-term options.”

AFRICAN AVIATION NUMBERS

Regional Breakdown: Where's Growth?

While North Africa might have the largest number of seats so far for 2026 with a 10.7% boost giving it 71.1 million seats, the region's growth levels has been outstripped by Eastern Africa where a 24.3% jump in seats means 46.5 million departure seats are currently available for 2026. Meanwhile, Southern Africa's increase of 19.1% gives it 35.5 million seats. Only Central and Western Africa have remained the same at about 29.2 million seats.

10.7%

North Africa Growth

71.1M seats - largest regional market

24.3%

Eastern Africa Growth

46.5M seats - fastest growing region

19.1%

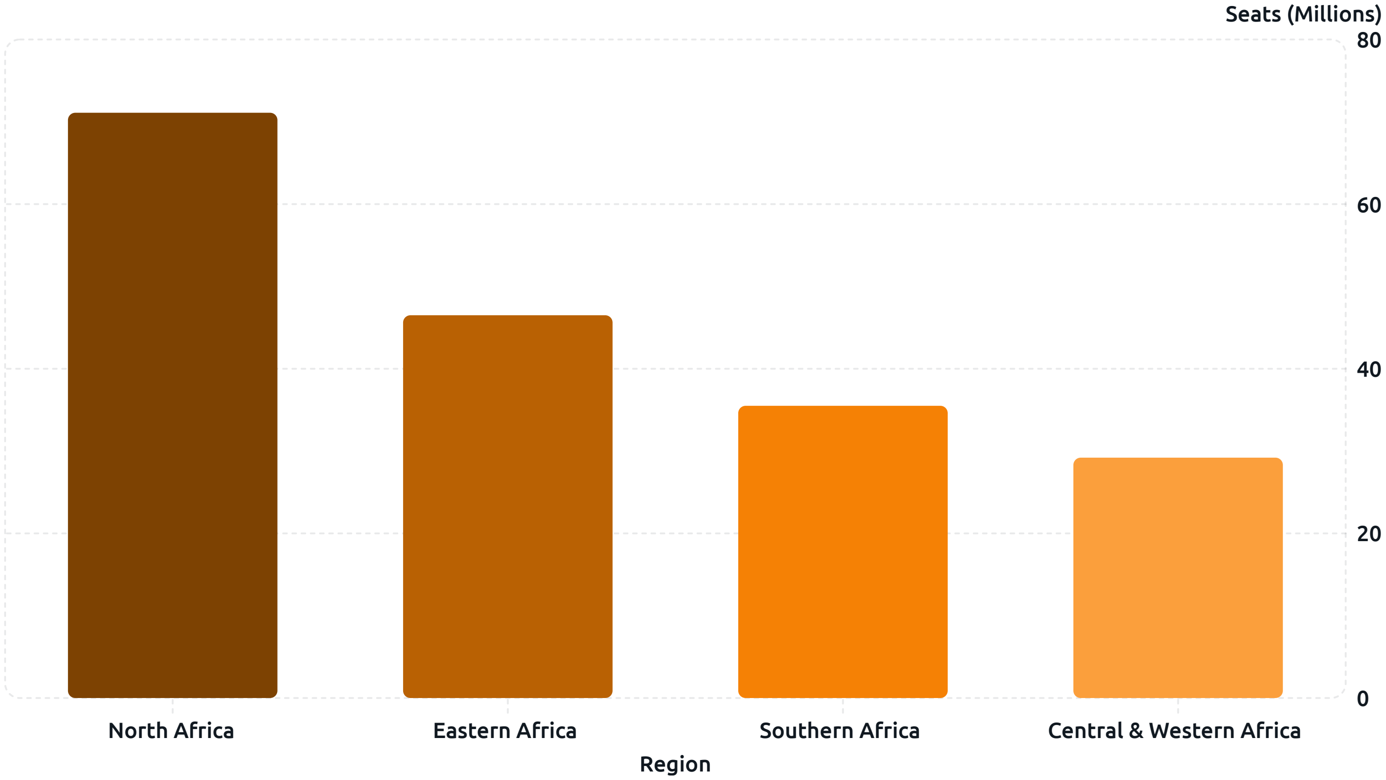
Southern Africa Growth

35.5M seats - strong recovery

~0%

Central & Western Africa

29.2M seats - growth stalled



AFRICAN AVIATION NUMBERS

Built on Strong Foundations

Africa's 2026 aviation surge is underpinned by robust tourism growth.

UN Tourism World Tourism Barometer

This 2026 growth in African aviation is built on strong foundations too, with the UN Tourism's World Tourism Barometer showing that Africa enjoyed the strongest growth globally of 10% in the first nine months of 2025 when the number of over-night global international tourists grew by 50 million, 5% year on year, to 1.1 billion. The UN Tourism's figures also show that of the top 20 best performing destinations globally, five were African with Egypt growing by 20%, South Africa up by 19%, Ethiopia increasing by 15%, Morocco by 14% and the Seychelles enjoying a 13% boost.

10%

Africa Tourism Growth

Strongest regional growth globally in first 9 months of 2025

5 of 20

Top Global Destinations

Five African nations in the UN Tourism top 20 best performers

345M

Passengers by 2043

IATA's projected annual African passenger figure - 3.7% annual growth rate

AFRICAN CARRIERS

Africa's Airlines: The Engines of Growth

Ethiopian Airlines leads the continent as Africa's largest international carrier with 23.8 million departure seats scheduled for January–October 2026, cementing its role as the continent's primary hub connector. But it is far from alone in driving Africa's aviation renaissance.

23.8M

Ethiopian Airlines Seats

Jan–Oct 2026 - Africa's largest international carrier

#1

Ethiopian Airlines Rank

Largest African airline by international departing seats

5

Top African Carriers

Ethiopian, EgyptAir, Safair, Royal Air Maroc & Air Algérie

Ethiopian Airlines: A Continental Powerhouse

Ethiopian Airlines' trajectory is remarkable. From 20.9 million seats in 2024 to a projected 23.8 million for the first ten months of 2026 alone, the carrier's Addis Ababa hub has become the gateway to Africa for travellers from Asia, the Americas and beyond. Its 30% co-investment in the new $12.5 billion Bishoftu International Airport underscores its long-term commitment to African aviation infrastructure.

> "Ethiopian Airlines is not just an airline – it is a development tool for Africa, connecting the continent to the world and the world to Africa."
>
> - ***Mesfin Tasew, Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO***

The Rise of African Low-Cost Carriers

Africa's LCC sector is also maturing rapidly. Safair, operating primarily within Southern Africa, has grown to 10.27 million seats for Jan–Oct 2026, while carriers like Air Arabia Maroc and Transavia are expanding their North African footprints and progressive branding - such as that used by Jambojet - appeals to modern audiences. The growth of budget carriers is critical to democratising air travel across the continent and stimulating demand in price-sensitive markets.

DATA TABLES

Top 10 African Countries by Departing Seats

#	Country	Full Year 2024	Full Year 2025	Jan-Oct 2025	Jan-Oct 2026	% ± 2025 - 2026
1	Egypt	31,112,333	33,310,263	27,400,528	30,861,446	+12.6%
2	South Africa	25,273,943	27,402,672	22,385,150	26,782,435	+19.6%
3	Morocco	20,261,655	22,407,935	18,495,617	22,530,288	+21.8%
4	Ethiopia	14,520,348	15,707,837	12,991,587	17,046,841	+31.2%
5	Nigeria	11,968,255	11,631,358	9,354,455	6,943,375	-25.7%
6	Algeria	10,189,135	11,327,825	9,331,099	10,037,055	+7.5%
7	Kenya	9,821,728	10,105,973	8,365,219	10,226,203	+22.2%
8	Tanzania	6,582,236	7,163,460	5,897,528	7,131,285	+20.9%
9	Tunisia	7,276,363	7,621,325	6,559,654	6,440,800	-2.8%
10	Ghana	3,142,198	3,234,132	2,689,018	2,747,958	+2.1%

MEET THE MARKETS

Where Is Growth Coming From?

OAG data shows that **Western Europe** remains the single biggest market with 44.2 million seats scheduled to fly to Africa for the first 10 months of 2026. Unsurprisingly, North Africa remains a key beneficiary of this market as it can be accessed by both Europe's traditional carriers and its low cost carriers (LCCs) keen to serve winter sun destinations that are increasingly opening up to the market.

This is evident in **Morocco** which has an open skies agreement with the EU and which means that the country will be served by 9.6 million mainline seats during the first 10 months of 2026, nearly a tenth less than the 10.6 million scheduled on LCCs for the same period.

While Egypt doesn't enjoy the same arrangements with the EU, it has still benefitted from Europe's LCC sector with more than 9 million seats scheduled for the 2026 period comprising about a third of the country's 27 million plus seats.

> "For North Africa much of the airlift is really European inbound with Ryanair and easyJet both having a fair share of the market and I don't think we realised how big the Moroccan market is."
>
> - ***John Grant, OAG Chief Analyst***

Elsewhere, he adds Cairo International Airport is seeking to build a new terminal as it runs out of capacity while the 2025 privatisation of Hurghada International Airport suggests the Egyptian authorities are becoming increasingly aware of the need to liberalise operations.

Sven Carlson Aviation managing director **Carl Denton** agrees that the increasing liberalisation of the North African market is helping drive aviation growth as can be seen in Tunisia, although a recent decision made by the government to alter its approach in a bid to protect its national carrier Tunisair saw a drop of 50,000 seats for 2026 with 1.34 million seats scheduled.

South Africa's Resilience

John Grant adds the European market has also been key in keeping South Africa's tourism strong, as it could have suffered badly following South African Airways' (SAA) recent financial issues which led to the carrier reducing its fleet to 20 aircraft, axing ex-Africa routes and operating mostly as a regional African carrier.

> "International airlines love South Africa as it is counter seasonal – their high season is the European winter season and the only real competition is Caribbean and that's about it."
>
> ***- John Grant, OAG Chief Analyst***

And the fact that South Africa's tourism market has remained so resilient shows that SAA has many opportunities to return to its former glories providing operations are handled differently and correctly, Kgomotso Ramothea from ATTA believes. The airlines' recently released results for 2024/25 show that it is finding its feet again having recorded a net profit of R155 million following a 35.89% increase in revenue to R8.838 billion, a trend which SAA group CEO Professor John Lamola has pledged to continue.

> "These results demonstrate that despite numerous challenges, SAA is on course for a bright future. We have entered a period of structured and strategic stabilisation of the business, focusing on institutionalising robust governance and agile management systems. We are continuing to implement plans on aircraft fleet modernisation and route network expansion aimed the elevation of customer experience."
>
> ***- Professor John Lamola, SAA Group CEO***

MEET THE MARKETS

The Middle East & Key Non-African Carriers

Until the end of February 2026, the Middle East had become the second biggest source market for Africa with 21.2 million seats scheduled for 2026; a number that Grant argued was set for moderate growth. That may well be revised given the current complexities in Gulf airspace, pressure on insurance premiums and decisions on airline fleet deployment.

> "For the Middle East hub carriers, Africa is always an important part of their connectivity and while it is well managed, it's not a market where there is significant rapid growth likely in the coming years."
>
> ***- John Grant, OAG Chief Analyst***

Going forward, the balance of Africa's self-sustaining hubs such as Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Johannesburg and Casablanca may offer Africa greater network resilience.

Top 5 Biggest Non-African Airlines Serving Africa in Departing Seats

Airline	2024 (M)	2025 (M)	Jan–Oct 2026 (M)
Emirates	4.3	4.7	5.2
Ryanair	4.8	5.4	4.9
Turkish Airlines	3.5	4.0	4.4
easyJet	2.6	3.4	4.1
Air France	3.7	3.7	3.7

REGIONAL FOCUS

East Africa: The Continent's Fastest Growing Region

East Africa is the standout regional growth story of 2026, recording a 24.3% jump in departure seats to 46.5 million - outpacing every other African region and cementing its status as the continent's most dynamic aviation market.

Ethiopia

31.2% growth to 17M departure seats Jan–Oct 2026 - the fastest growing of Africa's top 5 markets

Kenya

22.3% growth to 10.2M seats - Nairobi strengthening its position as East Africa's premier hub

Tanzania

7.1M seats scheduled, with Zanzibar driving strong leisure demand from Europe and the Middle East

Rwanda

Kigali emerging as a key MICE and transit hub, backed by RwandAir's expanding network and Qatar Airways' investment in Bugesera Airport

East Africa's aviation growth is closely tied to its tourism credentials, with its wildlife, landscapes and cultural heritage continuing to attract high-value visitors from Europe and North America. The growing African diaspora market is also driving demand on transatlantic routes, whilst Addis Ababa and Nairobi are not just tourism hubs, but intercontinental connectors with new infrastructure increasing Africa's competitiveness.

> "East Africa is where the energy is right now. The combination of world-class wildlife, improving infrastructure and visionary airlines is creating a perfect storm for aviation growth."
>
> ***- Kgomotso Ramothea, CEO of ATTA®***

REGIONAL FOCUS

North Africa: The Continent's Largest Aviation Market

North Africa remains Africa's biggest aviation region with 71.1 million departure seats scheduled for the first ten months of 2026 - a 10.7% increase on 2025. Its proximity to Europe and a well-established LCC ecosystem drive leisure demand.

Egypt: Capacity Under Pressure

Egypt leads the continent with 30.9 million departure seats for January–October 2026, a 12.6% increase on the same period in 2025. Cairo International Airport is seeking a new terminal as it runs out of capacity, with the 2025 privatisation of Hurghada signalling a need for investment.

Morocco: Open Skies, World Cup Ready

Morocco's 22.5 million seats for 2026 represent a 21.8% increase on 2025, the second fastest growth rate among Africa's top five markets. With Morocco co-hosting the 2030 FIFA World Cup, a $1.5 billion terminal expansion at Mohammed V International Airport is under way.

71.1M

North Africa Seats

Jan–Oct 2026, largest regional market on the continent

21.8%

Morocco Growth

Fastest growing North African market, driven by EU open skies

$1.5B

Morocco Airport Investment

New Mohammed V terminal to open 2029, doubling capacity

Tunisia's decision to alter its aviation liberalisation approach resulted in a drop of 50,000 seats for 2026. This example reminds us that protectionist policies can have an immediate negative impact on aviation capacity and tourism numbers.

> "For North Africa much of the airlift is really European inbound with Ryanair and easyJet both having a fair share of the market and I don't think we realised how big the Moroccan market is."
>
> ***- John Grant, OAG Chief Analyst***

REGIONAL FOCUS

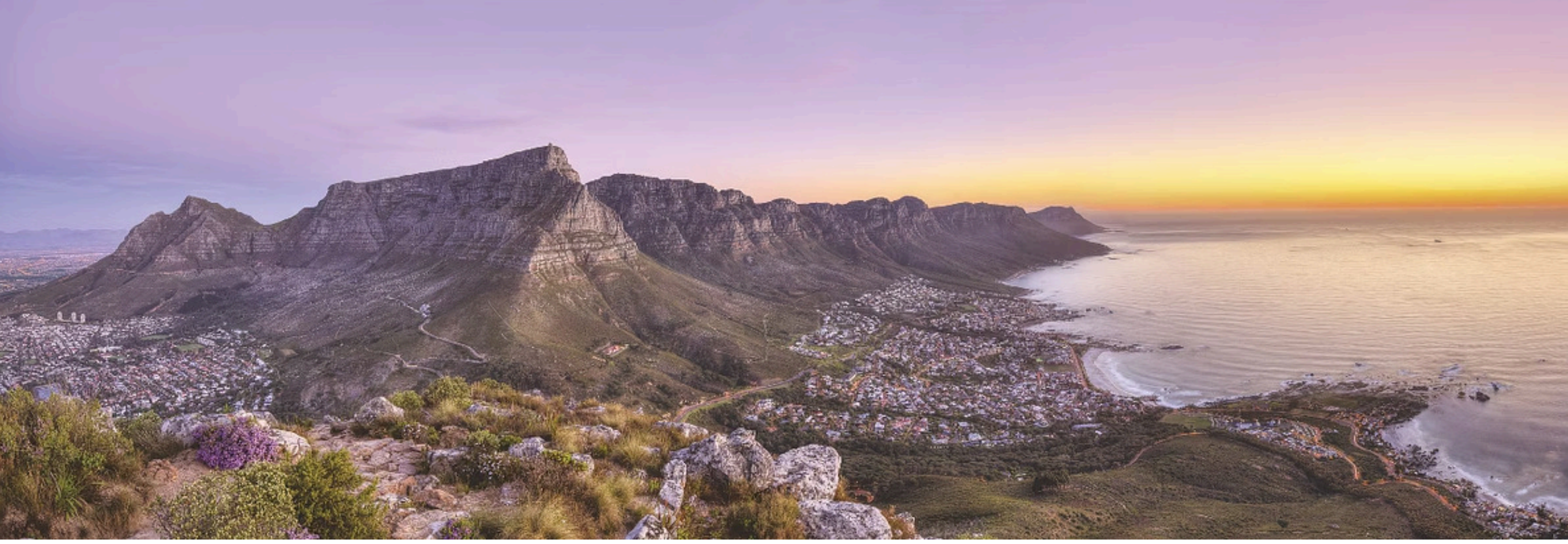
Southern Africa: Resilience, Recovery & Renewal

Southern Africa is one of the continent's most compelling aviation stories of 2026 - a region that has navigated significant headwinds to record a 19.1% increase in departure seats to 35.5 million. At the heart of that story is South Africa, a market that has demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of its national carrier's difficulties.

South Africa: Defying the Odds

South Africa's 26.8 million departure seats for January–October 2026 represent a 19.6% increase on 2025 - the second highest growth rate among Africa's top five markets. This is all the more remarkable given that South African Airways (SAA) has reduced its fleet to just 20 aircraft, axed ex-Africa routes and is now operating primarily as a regional carrier following its well-documented financial difficulties. The gap has been filled by international carriers who recognise South Africa's unique counter seasonal appeal.

> "International airlines love South Africa as it is counter seasonal – their high season is the European winter season and the only real competition is Caribbean and that's about it."
>
> ***- John Grant, OAG Chief Analyst***



REGIONAL FOCUS

SAA: Signs of Recovery

SAA's recently released results for 2024/25 offer genuine grounds for optimism. The airline recorded a net profit of R155 million following a 35.89% increase in revenue to R8.838 billion. SAA Group CEO Professor John Lamola has pledged to continue this trajectory, with plans for fleet modernisation and route network expansion already in development.

R155M Net Profit

SAA's 2024/25 results - the airline's first profit following its restructuring

35.89% Revenue Growth

Revenue rose to R8.838 billion as SAA stabilises its operations

Fleet Modernisation

Plans under way to expand and modernise SAA's fleet of 20 aircraft

Cape Town: Africa's Most Loved Destination

Cape Town continues to punch above its weight as one of Africa's most internationally recognised destinations. Work at Cape Town International Airport is due to start in March 2026, with a $1.34 billion upgrade covering runway improvements, enhanced security and expanded domestic and international terminals - part of a broader modernisation programme by Airports Company South Africa that will also benefit OR Tambo International and King Shaka International airports.

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

America Calling

Kgomotso Ramothea believes North and South America represent underexploited markets across the Atlantic.

OAG data shows that about **1.7 million seats** are scheduled from North America to Africa for 2026 while South America has **319,000 scheduled seats**.

> "North America is traditionally a key market for East African countries thanks to the wildlife and South Africa. However, we are also seeing increased interest in West Africa thanks to the interest generated by the 2019 homecoming campaigns.
>
> ***- Kgomotso Ramothea, CEO of ATTA®***

Key Opportunity Markets

North America: 1.7M seats scheduled for 2026 – traditionally strong for East Africa (wildlife) and South Africa

South America: 319K seats – currently driven largely by SAA, with Mexico identified as a lucrative growth market

West Africa: Seeing increased interest from the Americas thanks to the 2019 homecoming campaigns

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Government Backing

While Carl Denton has noted how government moves can lead to a negative impact in passenger numbers, Ramothea says they also have the power to create the legislation that boosts tourist numbers.

Algeria's 2023 decision to introduce visa-on-arrival for tourists led to an immediate 10% increase in international tourism numbers to 3.5 million in 2024.

> "Even the smallest tweaks to visas can boost tourism growth providing they make visiting a destination easier."
>
> ***- Kgomotso Ramothea, CEO of ATTA®***

POLICY & VISAS

Unlocking Growth: Visa Reform & Government Policy

Government policy is one of the most powerful levers available to drive aviation and tourism growth across Africa. From visa liberalisation to airport privatisation, the decisions made in government ministries can have an immediate and measurable impact on passenger numbers and airline capacity.

The Visa Effect

Algeria's 2023 decision to introduce visa-on-arrival for tourists visiting the southern Sahara region for up to 30 days produced an immediate 10% increase in international tourism numbers in 2024, rising to 3.5 million visitors. The example demonstrates how even modest policy changes can unlock significant demand.

Algeria

Visa-on-arrival for Sahara region (2023) → 10% tourism increase to 3.5M visitors in 2024

Rwanda

Visa-on-arrival for all nationalities → positioned Kigali as a leading MICE and transit hub

Ghana

Visa-on-arrival programme driving increased interest from the African diaspora in the Americas

Namibia

E-visa programme simplifying access for key source markets including Europe and North America

POLICY & VISAS

Unlocking Growth: Airport Privatisation and Future Outlook

Airport Privatisation

The 2025 privatisation of Hurghada International Airport in Egypt signals a growing recognition among African governments that liberalising airport operations can attract investment, improve efficiency and ultimately grow passenger numbers. Similar moves are being considered across the continent as governments seek to modernise aviation infrastructure without placing the full burden on public finances.

> "Even the smallest tweaks to visas can boost tourism growth providing they make visiting a destination easier."
>
> ***- Kgomotso Ramothea, CEO of ATTA®***

The Road Ahead

With 28% of intra-African routes already visa-free and momentum building behind further liberalisation, the direction of travel is clear. The challenge for governments is to move quickly enough to capitalise on the current wave of global interest in Africa as a destination before rival regions consolidate their own positions.

UPON ARRIVAL

Emerging Destinations & Infrastructure

Africa is modernising its infrastructure to welcome guests, exemplified by Angola's new Agostinho Neto International Airport, which opened in 2024 with a capacity for 15 million passengers.

> "2026 is all about emerging destinations and particularly so in Africa where countries like Angola are spending a lot of time and effort increasing awareness and dealing with the travel trade.
>
> "The trade needs to be pushing the message that you can visit Cape Town and then do a safari in Botswana on the same trip or combine a visit to Victoria Falls with a stay in Johannesburg."
>
> ***- Kgomotso Ramothea, CEO of ATTA®***

Intra-African Connectivity

The need for more African routes was highlighted at the 2025 AviaDev Africa conference in Zanzibar, where routes such as Maputo – Entebbe, Kigali – Lusaka, and Dar es Salaam – Brazzaville were identified as transformative for intra-African tourism. Just a single 100-seat aircraft operating three times a week could boost such routes, especially given that 28% of intra-African routes are visa-free, with countries like Rwanda, Ghana and Namibia further opening up via visa-on-arrival or e-visa programmes.

OPEN SKIES

Breaking Down Barriers: The Open Skies Challenge

Africa's aviation potential is significantly constrained by the absence of a meaningful pan-African open skies agreement. High taxes, protectionist policies and fragmented bilateral air service agreements continue to inflate ticket prices and limit route development across the continent.

The Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM)

The African Union's Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), launched in 2018, was designed to liberalise intra-African air travel. However, progress has been slow, with only 38 of 55 AU member states having signed up and fewer still having fully implemented its provisions. The result is that intra-African air travel remains among the most expensive in the world relative to distance travelled.

High Taxation

Aviation taxes in many African countries add significantly to ticket costs, making air travel unaffordable for large segments of the population and reducing demand.

Bilateral Restrictions

Many African routes are governed by outdated bilateral agreements that limit competition, restrict capacity and protect legacy carriers at the expense of passengers.

Infrastructure Gaps

Inadequate ground infrastructure, limited fuel availability and poor maintenance facilities at many African airports increase operating costs for airlines.

The Cost of Inaction

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) estimates that full liberalisation of African aviation could generate an additional $1.3 billion in GDP and create 155,000 new jobs across the continent. With African passenger numbers predicted to reach 345 million per annum by 2043, the stakes for getting policy right have never been higher.

> "The lack of any meaningful pan-African open-skies agreement continues to impact the sector. None of these problems are insoluble and we are urging governments, tourist boards and airlines to work more closely together."
>
> ***- Kgomotso Ramothea, CEO of ATTA®***

BUSINESS & SPORT

Business Time

And while tourism provides an excellent opportunity to drive aviation across Africa, Ramothea is also keen to promote the commercial opportunities available too.

She says South Africa has long been recognised as a key destination for business travellers with finance and mining offering two of the biggest opportunities. Equally importantly, the country offers both the high quality hotels and business convention centres, for instance the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) or the Johannesburg Expo Centre which hosted the 2025 G20 Summit.

> "South Africa is just one example of the opportunities available in Africa to host conferences and conventions in any sector.
>
> "Not only do we have spacious facilities required but also the latest technology and other supporting infrastructure required but we can also give any business traveller a taste of Africa too which is essential for anyone coming here."
>
> ***- Kgomotso Ramothea, CEO of ATTA®***

Top 5 Biggest African International Airlines in Departing Seats (Millions)

Airline	2024	2025	2026 (Jan–Oct)
Ethiopian Airlines	20.9	22.7	23.8
EgyptAir	9.7	9.8	10.28
Safair	10.6	11.8	10.27
Royal Air Maroc	7.2	7.8	9.1
Air Algérie	7.0	7.7	7.3

BUSINESS & SPORT

Sporting Chances: Major Events Driving Aviation Growth

Nor is the business world the only sector throwing up new opportunities to develop Africa's aviation network further, Ramothea says, with several international sports tournaments set to attract the world's attention.

FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup

Morocco - October 2026 (two months)

African Games

Egypt - January & February 2027

Africa Cup of Nations

Kenya, Tanzania & Uganda - June & July 2027

ICC Cricket World Cup

South Africa, Zimbabwe & Namibia - October & November 2027

> "Such international events always guarantee worldwide exposure and any country involved will be wise to highlight its tourism credentials to inbound visitors. Equally importantly, co-hosting these events provides opportunities for the countries to work together and provide the right conditions to encourage airlines to introduce new routes and grow traffic on existing ones."
>
> ***- Kgomotso Ramothea, CEO of ATTA®***

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Investing in Tomorrow's Aviation

While Africa was last year's fastest growing tourism destination with the growing aviation capacity to match, Ramothea says Africa must focus on ensuring this success continues into the future.

Construction has this year begun on the **$12.5 billion Bishoftu International Airport** by Addis Ababa which will become Ethiopian Airlines' principal hub once it opens in 2030 with an initial annual capacity of 60 million, with the aim that it will ultimately handle 110 million passengers per year.

The construction cost is also being part-funded by the airline which is meeting 30% of the total cost and illustrates how the public and private sectors can work together for mutual benefit.

> "This is truly a proud moment for Ethiopian Airlines and for all of Africa. Bishoftu International Airport is a major step towards addressing the infrastructural gap in Africa and a key player in implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and at Ethiopian we are committed to realise the completion of this project."
>
> ***- Mesfin Tasew, Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO***

> "The new terminal built at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport in 2019 with space for 22 million passengers has already vastly improved the experience of travelling to and through the country so an entire new facility will be a real game changer.
>
> "It is great for the country, the airline and ultimately the continent as it works as a hub connecting airports across Africa and beyond. It will also allow us to compete against the Middle Eastern hubs and carriers and provide new opportunities across the continent.
>
> "It is this sort of investment and public-private partnerships that we need to grow our tourism while tourist boards can help by creating awareness and demand in order to attract new airlines, grow new routes and increase capacity on existing ones both into Africa and throughout its regions.
>
> "If this goes hand in hand with further visa relaxation rules then we can ensure Africa remains the fastest growing tourist region well into the future for all our benefit."
>
> ***- Kgomotso Ramothea, CEO of ATTA®***

INFRASTRUCTURE SPOTLIGHT

Five Key African Airport Developments 2020–2030

1 Bishoftu International Airport, Ethiopia

Construction is now under way on the $12.5 billion Bishoftu International Airport outside Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa. Ethiopian Airlines has picked up 30% of the cost of the new facility which will become its principal hub when it opens in 2030. The airport will have an initial capacity of 60 million passengers per year although this will nearly double to 110 million once full operations are assumed.

2 Agostinho Neto International Airport, Angola

Angola's new Agostinho Neto International Airport commenced operations for domestic operations in November 2024 before opening up to the world's airlines in October 2025. The three-terminal facility has two parallel runways with one measuring 4,000 metres, meaning there is enough space for an Airbus A380 to land. The facility's total capacity is for 15 million passengers per year, 5 million domestic and the remaining 10 million international.

3 Mohammed V International Airport, Morocco

Morocco's preparations for hosting the 2030 FIFA World Cup in conjunction with Spain and Portugal are well under way following the commencement of work on a new terminal at Mohammed V International Airport in July 2025. The $1.5 billion terminal will have room for 20 million travellers – more than double the current 15 million capacity – when it is scheduled to open in 2029. The new terminal will be complemented by a new air traffic control tower while immediate rail links will connect the airport with the country's public transport network.

4 Bugesera International Airport, Rwanda

While it's been in the pipeline since 2010, work only started on Bugesera International Airport in 2017 with completion predicted for 2028. The $2 billion airport's construction is being part funded by Qatar Airways and will have capacity for 7 million passengers when the first phase is completed. This capacity at the airport near Kigali will then double to 14 million once the facility's construction is completed in 2032.

5 Cape Town International Airport, South Africa

Africa's southernmost airport is set for an upgrade as part of a plan to modernise the facility and grow capacity. The work at Cape Town International Airport is due to start in March 2026 and will include a runway upgrade, improved security systems and expansion of both the domestic and international terminals. The $1.34 billion project is being under taken by Airports Company South Africa and will see similar upgrades at its other South African facilities, OR Tambo International Airport and King Shaka International Airport.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A Call to Action: What Must Happen Next

Africa's aviation and tourism sectors stand at a pivotal moment. The data is compelling, the demand is real, and the investment is flowing. But sustaining this momentum requires co-ordinated action from governments, airlines, airports and tourism stakeholders across the continent.

Accelerate SAATM Implementation

Governments must move beyond signing the Single African Air Transport Market agreement to full implementation, removing bilateral restrictions and enabling true open skies across the continent.

Reform Aviation Taxation

High taxes on aviation fuel, tickets and airport operations must be reviewed and reduced to make African air travel more competitive and accessible to a broader range of travellers.

Invest in Airport Infrastructure

Public-private partnerships, as demonstrated by the Bishoftu Airport model, should be replicated across the continent to fund the infrastructure upgrades needed to handle growing passenger volumes.

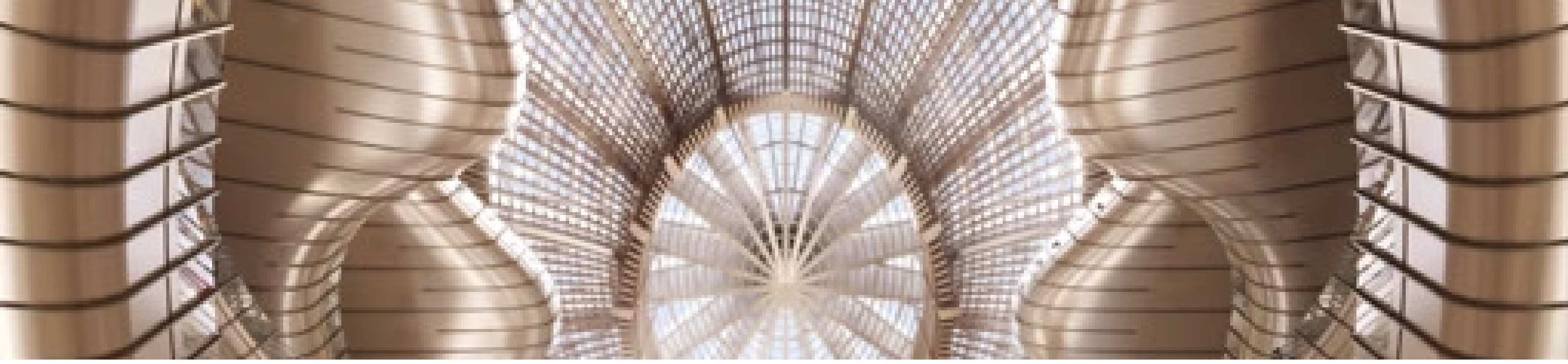
Liberalise Visa Regimes

Governments should follow the lead of Rwanda, Ghana and Algeria in simplifying visa access for key source markets, with e-visa and visa-on-arrival programmes proven to deliver immediate tourism growth.

Develop New Source Markets

Tourism boards and airlines must work together to develop underexploited markets in North America, South America and Asia, building awareness and creating the route economics that will attract new airline services.

ATTA® – The African Travel & Tourism Association stands ready to support governments, airlines and tourism stakeholders in developing the strategies and partnerships needed to realise Africa's full aviation and tourism potential. Contact us at atta.travel to find out more.



SUMMARY & OUTLOOK

Africa's Aviation Future Takes Flight

Africa's aviation sector is experiencing unprecedented growth, with double-digit increases in capacity, record tourism numbers, and billions of dollars in infrastructure investment signalling a continent on the rise.

Record Growth

182.4M departure seats in 2026, 13.7% year-on-year increase, and Africa named the world's fastest growing tourism region

Global Demand

Western Europe leads with 44.2M seats, the Middle East provides 21.2M, and the Americas represent a major untapped opportunity

Infrastructure Investment

Over $17 billion committed to five major airport projects from Ethiopia to South Africa, with public-private partnerships leading the way

SUMMARY & OUTLOOK

Challenges to Address

High Taxation – Long-standing tax burdens on aviation continue to impact the sector's competitiveness.

Infrastructure Gaps – Despite major investments, many airports and routes still require modernisation and expansion.

Open Skies – The lack of any meaningful pan-African open-skies agreement continues to limit intra-African connectivity.

Visa Barriers – While progress is being made, visa restrictions still hinder tourism growth across many markets.

Fuel Cost Volatility – African airlines operating on thin margins are particularly exposed to aviation fuel increases caused by current geopolitical instability; governments could consider reducing fuel taxes to sustain growth.

The path forward: Co-ordinated action between governments, airlines and tourism stakeholders – combining infrastructure investment, visa relaxation, and public-private partnerships – will be essential if Africa is to capitalise fully on its growing global appeal and secure long-term aviation and tourism growth.

ABOUT

About ATTA® – The African Travel & Tourism Association

ATTA® is the leading trade association for the African travel and tourism industry, representing businesses and organisations with a professional interest in travel to, from and within Africa.

Who We Are

Founded in 1994, ATTA® brings together tour operators, airlines, hotels, tourist boards, travel agents and media from across Africa and around the world. Our members share a common commitment to promoting Africa as a world-class travel and tourism destination and to developing the industry in a sustainable and responsible way.

What We Do

ATTA® provides its members with networking opportunities, market intelligence, advocacy support and a platform to engage with key decision-makers across the African travel and tourism ecosystem. We work closely with governments, international organisations and industry bodies to shape the policies and partnerships that will drive Africa's tourism growth.

Key Facts

- Members in over 30 countries across Africa and beyond
- Annual World Travel Market Africa networking events
- Regular white papers, research and market intelligence
- Direct engagement with African governments and tourism ministries
- CEO: Kgomotso Ramothea

Get in Touch

To find out more about ATTA® membership, events and advocacy work, visit **atta.travel** or contact us at **info@atta.travel**.

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