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Africa Focus At The 26th WTTC Global Summit



**ATC Seeks Greater Recognition
Of Travel And Tourism's
Contribution To GDP, Increased
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The Envoy Hotel Makes It Four In A Row At World Travel Awards










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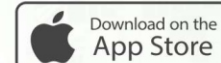
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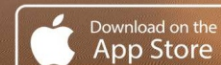
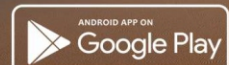
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José María Aznar, former Spanish Prime Minister with Nick Adams, US Tourism Adviser

WTTC Announces Former Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, U.S. Tourism Adviser Nick Adams For Malta Global Summit

Former Spanish Prime Minister and first U.S. Tourism Minister to bring global perspectives on leadership, competitiveness and the future of Travel & Tourism to Valletta 14 September 2026, Madrid, Spain: The World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC] today announced two further high-profile speakers for its 26th Global Summit in Valletta, Malta, taking place between 7–9 October 2026 at the Mediterranean Conference Centre. José María Aznar, former Prime Minister of Spain, and His Excellency, Ambassador Nick Adams, U.S.

Tourism Minister, will join more than 1,000 delegates from over 100 countries including 200 of the world's leading Travel & Tourism CEOs, senior executives and government leaders.

Their participation will bring two powerful perspectives to the Summit: the experience of a former European head of government who led Spain through a period of

significant economic transformation, and the voice of the United States' first-ever Special Presidential Envoy for Tourism, reflecting the growing strategic importance governments are placing on Travel & Tourism.

Held under the theme "FUTU[RE]SET", the Summit will bring together global business and political leaders to examine the forces reshaping the sector and explore how governments and industry can work together to unlock investment, strengthen competitiveness and build a more resilient future.

José María Aznar, who served as Prime Minister of Spain from 1996 to 2004, will bring his experience of leading a major European economy and navigating periods of profound geopolitical and economic change. His participation will add a senior international perspective to discussions around leadership, Europe's future competitiveness, global cooperation and the role of Travel & Tourism as a bridge

between economies, cultures and people.

His Excellency, Ambassador Nick Adams, the first U.S. Tourism Minister, said of his keynote speech: "Tourism is diplomacy with a suitcase. I'm proud to bring America's voice to Valletta and help lead the partnerships that will define the next decade of travel."

With the United States representing the world's largest Travel & Tourism market, Ambassador Adams' participation reflects the increasing recognition of tourism as a driver of economic growth, investment, jobs and international engagement.

H.E. Adams has made stronger public-private collaboration a central focus of his international engagement, highlighting the role governments and businesses can play together in unlocking investment, removing barriers to growth and strengthening the long-term resilience of Travel & Tourism.

Together, the two

speakers will contribute to a Summit programme examining some of the most pressing questions facing the sector, from geopolitical change and global competitiveness to investment, technology, connectivity and the changing traveller.

The programme will also explore how Travel & Tourism can continue to create jobs, attract investment and deliver economic opportunity while adapting to a rapidly changing global environment. With governments increasingly recognising the strategic importance of the sector, FUTU[RE]SET will provide a platform to examine what effective leadership and stronger collaboration can deliver in the decade ahead.

For Malta, the gathering will further reinforce its position at the centre of global Travel & Tourism. More than 200 CEOs and senior leaders, government representatives and international media will gather in Valletta, giving Malta an exceptional opportunity to showcase its tourism success story, hospitality, heritage, connectivity and diverse visitor offering.

The 2026 Global Summit follows WTTC's ongoing efforts to bring together the most influential voices in Travel & Tourism and strengthen the relationship between governments and the private sector at a pivotal time for the industry. The Summit in Malta will provide a unique opportunity for leaders to challenge conventional thinking, exchange ideas and help shape the next chapter of global Travel & Tourism.

Gloria Guevara, President & CEO, WTTC, said: "We are delighted to welcome two leaders of such distinction to our Global Summit in Malta. José María

Aznar brings decades of experience at the highest level of government, while Ambassador Nick Adams represents a new era of U.S. leadership in Travel & Tourism. Their perspectives will add tremendous value to the global conversation taking place in Valletta.

FUTU[RE]SET is about looking beyond today and asking what leadership, collaboration and investment are needed to build the future of our sector. Bringing political and business leaders together in Malta gives us a unique opportunity to challenge conventional thinking, share ideas and turn ambition into action."

Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority, said: "We are proud to welcome the WTTC Global Summit to Malta and to host some of the most influential voices shaping the future of Travel & Tourism. The participation of José María Aznar and Ambassador Nick Adams further strengthens an exceptional programme that will bring together global leaders from business and government. This Summit offers a unique opportunity to showcase Malta's hospitality, heritage and connectivity, while fostering the dialogue and collaboration needed to drive sustainable growth and innovation across the sector."

For senior executives looking to be part of this landmark gathering, WTTC is offering a limited number of Executive Access Passes to the 2026 Global Summit. For the first time, senior leaders from organisations outside the WTTC Membership community can join the world's leading Travel & Tourism CEOs and government leaders in Valletta, with access to the full Summit agenda, exclusive networking opportunities and key social events.



Gloria Guevara, President/Chief Executive Officer, World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC].

Africa Focus At The 26th WTTC Global Summit

The decision to convene an exclusive Africa Focus Session at the 26th World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC] Global Summit in Valletta, Malta, from October 7–9, 2026, provides an important opportunity to place Africa's travel and tourism industry more firmly on the global agenda.

The session, taking place on the sidelines of the invitation-only summit at the Mediterranean Conference Centre, comes at a time when

African countries need to recognise tourism not merely as a leisure activity, but as an important instrument for economic diversification, employment, investment, regional integration and connectivity.

The WTTC Global Summit brings together Heads of Government, Tourism Ministers, Chief Executive Officers, investors and senior industry leaders. Its focus on sustainability, digital transformation,

investment, resilience and the future of global tourism provides an appropriate platform for Africa to articulate its priorities. For the continent, the challenge is not simply attracting more international visitors. Africa must also make it easier and more affordable for Africans to travel within Africa, while improving air connectivity, destination marketing, infrastructure and the investment environment.

The Africa Focus Session is expected to bring African tourism leaders and global industry executives together to examine investment, regional connectivity, seamless travel, sustainable tourism, destination competitiveness and stronger public-private partnerships.

Tourism Ministers and representatives from major regional and continental institutions are expected to participate, including the Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS], Southern African Development Community [SADC], East African Community [EAC], Economic Community of Central African States [ECCAS], Arab Maghreb Union [UMA], African Continental Free Trade Area [AfCFTA] and African Union [AU]. The proposed ministerial participation of Togo would further strengthen the West

African dimension of the dialogue.

Africa has enormous tourism assets, from wildlife and cultural heritage to beaches, historical sites, mountains, gastronomy and vibrant cities. Yet the continent continues to face barriers including inadequate air connectivity, high travel costs, visa and border restrictions, weak destination marketing, infrastructure gaps and insufficient funding for tourism promotion.

These challenges require a coordinated continental response. Tourism should be better integrated into Africa's wider economic and regional integration agenda, including the implementation of AfCFTA. Stronger cooperation among regional economic communities, national tourism organisations and the private sector could help facilitate intra-African travel and unlock greater investment.

Tourism promotion also requires adequate funding. Many African tourism authorities operate with limited resources for international marketing, research, product development and destination promotion, making it difficult to compete effectively in the global market.

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The Envoy: Dewald Kruger, General Manager and Akinyemi Adebayo Muideen, Financial Controller during the awards ceremony in Zanzibar.

The Envoy Hotel Makes It Four In A Row At World Travel Awards

The Envoy Hotel, Abuja, has achieved another remarkable milestone in Nigeria's hospitality industry, emerging as Nigeria's Leading Boutique Hotel at the 2026 World Travel Awards.

The latest triumph makes it four consecutive victories for the Abuja-based luxury hotel in the prestigious category, further reinforcing its position as one of Nigeria's consistently recognised hospitality brands.

Located on Diplomatic Drive, Abuja, The Envoy Hotel has established itself as a preferred destination for business travellers, diplomats, government officials and leisure guests seeking luxury accommodation and premium hospitality in Nigeria's capital.

However, The Envoy Hotel's World Travel Awards record goes back even further. Between 2019 and 2021, the hotel also won the Nigeria's Leading City Hotel category for three consecutive years.

This means that The Envoy has maintained a remarkable presence among the country's award-winning hotels over a significant period, securing

seven national-category victories across the 2019–2026 period, including three consecutive Leading City Hotel titles and, subsequently, four consecutive Leading Boutique Hotel titles.

The hotel's continued recognition at the World Travel Awards is a testament to its commitment to quality service delivery, personalised guest experiences and excellence in the Nigerian hospitality industry.

The Envoy's achievement also highlights the importance of consistency in hospitality. While winning an award is an important milestone, retaining a title over successive years requires hotels to maintain standards and respond to changing guest expectations.

For The Envoy Hotel, the latest honour represents more than another addition to its awards collection. It reinforces the hotel's brand identity and its ambition to remain a leading name in Nigeria's luxury boutique hospitality market.

The recognition is also

four consecutive victories as Nigeria's Leading Boutique Hotel from 2023 to 2026, demonstrate a sustained record of recognition across two categories.

Winning the same national category for four consecutive years is a notable accomplishment in a hospitality market where service quality, comfort, ambience, facilities and customer satisfaction are important considerations for guests.

The Envoy's achievement also highlights the importance of consistency in hospitality. While winning an award is an important milestone, retaining a title over successive years requires hotels to maintain standards and respond to changing guest expectations.

For The Envoy Hotel, the latest honour represents more than another addition to its awards collection. It reinforces the hotel's brand identity and its ambition to remain a leading name in Nigeria's luxury boutique hospitality market.

The recognition is also

significant against the background of efforts to promote Nigeria as a competitive destination for international and domestic tourism.

Nigeria possesses considerable tourism assets, including cultural attractions, historical sites, business opportunities and a growing hospitality market. However, tourism development continues to face challenges relating to infrastructure, transportation, security, operating costs and destination marketing.

Hotels play an important role in supporting tourism by providing accommodation, dining, conference and business services required by travellers, investors and event organisers.

The performance of established hospitality brands such as The Envoy Hotel demonstrates the potential of Nigerian businesses to compete for international recognition when they maintain a strong

focus on quality and guest satisfaction.

International awards can also improve the visibility of Nigerian hotels among travellers, investors, event organisers and tourism professionals.

The Envoy Hotel's location in Abuja's diplomatic district gives it a distinctive position within Nigeria's hospitality landscape.

The Federal Capital Territory is home to government institutions, foreign missions, international organisations and business establishments. These create demand for quality accommodation and hospitality services capable of meeting the needs of both domestic and international visitors.

A hotel operating in this environment must deliver more than accommodation. It must provide a combination of comfort, security, professional service and facilities suitable for

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Dr. Lucky Onoriode George, Publisher/Editor, African Travel Times; Barr. Anastasia Ugbaka and Dewald Kruger, General Manager, The Envoy Hotel.

related airspace closures across the Sahel region. A no-fly corridor extending about 4,000 kilometres over Niger, Mali, Sudan, and Libya forces airlines to reroute, increasing fuel consumption and overall operating expenses.

AFRAA Secretary General Abderahmane Berthe highlighted that while African aviation holds significant potential to drive regional economic growth, systemic barriers continue to impede progress.

He stated, "African aviation is ready to deliver on its promise to connect our economies, move our trade, and carry the growth that this continent's youth and enterprise are already generating. But readiness is not the same as capacity. Our airlines are being asked to carry that promise on some of the thinnest margins in the world, while absorbing costs, blocked funds, and shocks that carriers elsewhere simply do not face."

Berthe urged governments to release blocked funds, reduce the tax burden on air travel, and implement existing liberalisation policies.

He also acknowledged the critical role of partners such as Afreximbank, the African Development Bank, and the African Union Commission, whose involvement in financing and infrastructure development is vital for the sector's future.

As African airlines confront these multifaceted challenges, industry leaders warn that without decisive and coordinated action, the continent risks failing to fully realise the benefits of its rapidly expanding passenger market.



Kenya Airway Plane

Berthe: African Airlines Struggle With Minimal Profit Margins Amid Rapid Passenger Growth

...African airlines are expected to transport 137.3 million passengers by 2026, marking a significant 21.5% increase from the previous year.

Despite this surge in demand, the industry's profit margins remain critically low at just 0.2%, one of the thinnest globally.

This paradox between rising passenger numbers and negligible profitability was a central focus at the recent African media roundtable held at Nairobi's Sarit Expo Centre, themed "Resilient African Aviation: Partnerships, Empowerment, Profitability."

Africa's demographic and economic trends suggest a promising future for air travel. The continent's population is projected to reach 1.58 billion by 2026, with a median age of 19 and an average annual economic growth rate of 4.3%.

Yet, air travel penetration remains strikingly low at only 7%, one of the lowest rates worldwide. The African Airlines Association [AFRAA], which represents 50 member

airlines responsible for over 85% of Africa's international air traffic, has called for urgent, coordinated efforts from governments, regional bodies, and financial institutions to turn this growing demand into sustainable profitability.

African carriers face numerous financial and operational pressures that severely limit their profitability. Taxes, fees, and charges make up 35% to 40% of ticket prices, nearly double the global average of 20%.

Additionally, governments across the continent are withholding approximately \$774 million in blocked airline funds as of March 2026, the largest regional share of trapped funds worldwide.

This issue is part of a broader \$1 billion blocked-funds crisis affecting Africa and the Middle East, driven by foreign-exchange shortages and administrative hurdles.

Ethiopian Airlines, Africa's largest carrier, alone has \$90 million trapped in overseas markets.

These financial constraints are compounded by high, unhedged fuel costs, which have also impacted global airlines such as Ryanair, forcing them to reduce traffic targets and warn of declining profits.

Together, these factors put African airlines under intense pressure, limiting their ability to capitalise on the continent's growing air travel demand. The African aviation sector is further hindered by structural inequities and geopolitical challenges. The continent receives only 2% of global aircraft deliveries, compared with Asia-Pacific's 35.6% and Europe's 24%.

Meanwhile, Africa requires an estimated \$25 to \$30 billion in airport and air navigation infrastructure investment over the next decade to accommodate increasing passenger volumes.

Operational costs are also rising due to conflict-

US Judge Blocks Trump Limits On How Long Foreign Students, Journalists Can Stay

A federal judge on Monday blocked U.S. President Donald Trump's administration from implementing a new rule that would limit how long foreign students and journalists can remain in the U.S. without applying for extensions.

U.S. District Judge F. Dennis Saylor in Boston ruled, opens new tab in favour of a coalition of unions and higher education advocacy groups a day before the Department of Homeland Security's rule was set to take effect.

Saylor said DHS adopted the policy based on "exceptionally weak" rationales. The agency had cited national security and the need to prevent fraud in the visa programme, but the judge found it had not adhered to its legal obligations to engage with concerns about a policy change or consider less burdensome alternatives.

In a statement, DHS General Counsel James Percival criticized Saylor's ruling, saying that under it, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement must "permit this rampant abuse of our immigration system."

"Come on a student visa, take one class per semester, and stay here for decades," he said.

Saylor, an appointee of Republican President George W. Bush, wrote that, opens new tab the rule upended a system through which the U.S. for nearly five decades had issued visas to foreign students for their "duration of status."

That system, he said, has permitted tens of millions of foreign students and researchers to come to the U.S., leading to "groundbreaking research in science, medicine, and technology, substantial economic growth, and a host of other benefits, often on a vast scale."

Saylor said the rule DHS adopted in July seeks to replace that system with one that would substantially restrict the overall number of foreign students, professors and journalists in the country.



Mr. Ola Awakan, Director General, Nigerian Tourism Development Authority [NTDA] With China Tourism Academy President In Beijing

Nigeria Strengthens Tourism Ties With China As NTDA DG Meets China Tourism Academy President In Beijing

Nigeria's tourism development, promotion and destination marketing efforts are set for a new phase of strategic cooperation with China following a high-level meeting between the Director-General of the Nigerian Tourism Development Authority [NTDA], Ola Awakan, and the President of the China Tourism Academy [Data Centre of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism], Dai Bin, in Beijing.

The meeting focused on strengthening Nigeria-China tourism relations, with particular emphasis on developing the Chinese tourism market for Nigeria, leveraging tourism intelligence and traveller trends, and positioning Nigerian destinations to attract a greater share of

China's outbound tourism market.

Speaking during the meeting, Awakan highlighted the need for a structured China-Nigeria Tourism Market Development Programme, which would enable Nigeria to better understand Chinese outbound tourism patterns and develop tourism products and destination-marketing strategies tailored to the Chinese market.

He also called for enhanced technical and capacity-building cooperation in destination development, tourism data and research, standards, and institutional capacity development for the NTDA and state tourism agencies.

According to him, greater collaboration should also facilitate investment and business exchanges by

creating pathways for Chinese tourism investors, operators and hospitality businesses to access investment-ready tourism opportunities in Nigeria. Awakan reiterates the interest of Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu in diversifying the country's

economy through tourism.

In his response, the President of the China Tourism Academy commended Awakan for what he described as transformative initiatives within Nigeria's tourism ecosystem. Dai Bin noted that Nigeria is endowed with abundant cultural and historical tourism resources and expressed the Academy's commitment to building a strategic partnership with the NTDA to support the realisation of its mandate.

Dai Bin stressed the importance of improving Nigeria's image and visibility among Chinese travellers and tourism operators, noting that a better understanding of Nigeria would help strengthen tourism exchanges between both countries.

"Nigeria's image needs to be promoted in the minds of the Chinese people for our operators and tourists to understand your country better. We need to create more exchange programmes in education, training and businesses," he said.

The China Tourism Academy also expressed its readiness to work with the NTDA towards facilitating the establishment of a Nigerian International Tourism Promotion Centre

in China. The proposed centre is expected to strengthen the strategic partnership, promote Nigerian destinations and tourism products, and deepen market understanding between Nigeria and China for both inbound and outbound tourism.

The meeting was attended by the Director of the Department of International Exchange and Finance at the China Tourism Academy, Dr. Yang Jinsong, alongside other senior management officials of the Academy.

The engagement formed part of Awakan's working visit to China, during which he is gaining insights into China's tourism and development strategies. The visit also includes his participation in a seminar on Climate Action and the Sustainable Development Goals for Developing Countries, facilitated by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce.

The engagement underscores Nigeria's growing efforts to expand international tourism partnerships, attract tourism investment, strengthen destination marketing and position the country more strategically within the global tourism marketplace.



Mr. Ola Awakan and some staff of the Academy.

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business and leisure guests.

The Envoy Hotel's recognition reflects the importance of this market and the opportunities available to hospitality operators that maintain a strong service culture.

The World Travel Awards is an international travel and tourism awards programme that recognises excellence across different segments of the industry, including hotels, airlines, destinations and tourism services.

Its national and regional categories provide hospitality establishments with opportunities to gain recognition within their markets and before an international audience.

The Envoy Hotel's award history has established a strong record of recognition for the property. Its victories as Nigeria's Leading City Hotel from 2019 to 2021, followed by its consecutive Leading Boutique Hotel titles from 2023 through 2026, underline the hotel's sustained presence among Nigeria's recognised hospitality brands.

As Nigeria continues to seek greater investment in tourism and hospitality, the achievements of hotels such as The Envoy provide an opportunity to highlight the potential of the sector.



The industry requires sustained investment in infrastructure, staff training, marketing, technology and service improvement. It also needs stronger collaboration between government agencies, private-sector operators and tourism stakeholders.

For The Envoy Hotel, the latest World Travel Awards victory represents another notable milestone in its journey.

From its three consecutive Leading City Hotel titles between 2019 and 2021 to its four consecutive Leading Boutique Hotel victories from 2023 to 2026, the hotel has built a record of recognition that places it among Nigeria's notable hospitality establishments.

The achievement reinforces the importance of maintaining standards, delivering quality guest experiences and building hospitality brands capable of attracting recognition on the international stage.

The Envoy Hotel's latest success is therefore not only a milestone for the property but also another indication of the capacity of Nigeria's hospitality industry to produce brands capable of earning sustained international attention.



AFRICA-CARIBBEAN TRAVEL CORRIDOR

African Caribbean Travel Corridor Launches To Connect Africa And The Caribbean

After much planning and consultation, the African Caribbean Travel Corridor [ACTC] is being established as a new joint venture initiative designed to transform travel, tourism and logistics connectivity between Africa and the Caribbean.

The ACTC brings together three experienced organisations and industry leaders: African Caribbean Sustainability & Investment Initiative CIC [ACSII], led by Chairman David F. Roberts; The Africa Guide, led by Dr Vicki L. Otariyina, Founder Group CEO; and the Africa Center for Hospitality, Aviation and Tourism [AfCHAT], led by Chief Executive Officer Akwasi Agyeman.

The initiative responds to a longstanding challenge: despite deep historical, cultural and economic connections between Africa and the Caribbean, travelling between the two regions remains unnecessarily difficult, expensive and fragmented. The ACTC seeks to change that.

Its objective is to develop an integrated Africa-Caribbean Travel Corridor connecting people, businesses, investors, tourists,

students, professionals and families, while creating new opportunities for airlines, hospitality companies, tour operators, logistics providers and other travel-related businesses.

A major component of the emerging corridor will be improved direct air connectivity. Air Peace has already established direct services connecting Lagos with Barbados and Antigua, and the partners plan to build on this with further routes and gateways between West Africa and the Caribbean.

Such connections could significantly reduce the time, cost and complexity associated with travelling between the regions, while opening new markets for tourism and investment.

David F. Roberts, Chairman of ACSII, said: "For too long, the Atlantic has connected Africa and the Caribbean historically and culturally, but not sufficiently through modern transportation and commercial infrastructure.

The African Caribbean Travel Corridor is about changing that. We want to make Africa-Caribbean travel easier, more affordable and

commercially meaningful."

Dr Vicki L. Otariyina, Founder & Group CEO of The Africa Guide, added: "The Caribbean is one of Africa most important global communities and markets, yet there remains a significant travel and tourism gap between our regions. ACTC is designed to turn that gap into an opportunity by creating practical pathways for people to travel, discover, invest and do business across the Atlantic."

Akwasi Agyeman, CEO of AfCHAT, said: "Connectivity is fundamental to the growth of tourism. By bringing African and Caribbean tourism stakeholders together and improving access between the two regions, ACTC can contribute to a new era of tourism development, investment and collaboration."

The ACTC will explore and develop opportunities across aviation, tourism, hospitality, logistics, travel technology, destination marketing and investment, while working with governments, airlines, airports, tourism authorities and private-sector partners.

Beyond aviation, the initiative is intended to create a wider ecosystem that supports seamless movement between Africa and the Caribbean and strengthens the commercial relationships underpinning the Africa-Caribbean economic corridor.

The launch comes at a time of growing interest in strengthening Africa-Caribbean relations and unlocking the enormous potential of the global African and Caribbean diaspora. The partners believe that improved connectivity can become a catalyst for increased tourism, business travel, investment and cultural exchange.



Ignatius Amaduwa Atigbi, former Head of the Nigeria Tourist Association [NTA], now the Nigerian Tourism Development Authority [NTDA]; initiator of World Tourism Day [WTD]; and former Chairman of the African Travel Commission [ATC].

ATC Seeks Greater Recognition Of Travel And Tourism's Contribution To GDP, Increased Funding For Promotion In Africa

As the world prepares to mark the 2026 edition of World Tourism Day [WTD] on 27 September, the African Travel Commission [ATC] has called on African governments, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, to give greater recognition to the contribution of travel and tourism to national economies and provide adequate funding for the development and promotion of the sector.

The Commission said World Tourism Day provides an important opportunity for governments, tourism authorities, the private sector and other stakeholders to reflect on the contribution of travel and

tourism to economic and social development and examine what more can be done to strengthen the industry.

World Tourism Day is an annual global event celebrated every 27 September and has been observed since 1980. The occasion highlights the economic, social and cultural importance of tourism and provides an opportunity to draw attention to the industry's contribution to development.

For the ATC, however, the annual celebration should go beyond ceremonies and statements and serve as an opportunity for African governments to

examine the level of commitment and resources being devoted to the development of the sector.

The Commission believes that travel and tourism remains one of the most important sectors capable of generating employment, attracting investment, promoting cultural understanding and supporting economic diversification across the African continent.

The ATC expressed concern that, despite Africa's enormous tourism resources, many countries continue to underfund the sector and fail to adequately recognise and measure its contribution to Gross Domestic Product [GDP].

The Commission's leadership maintained that tourism should no longer be treated as a secondary activity that receives attention only after other sectors have been allocated resources.

Rather, it argued, the industry must be recognised as a strategic component of national economic planning, with appropriate budgetary allocations for infrastructure, destination marketing, research, skills development, product development and investment promotion.

The economic significance of tourism is reflected in the performance of several African destinations in 2025.

Morocco recorded a record 19.8 million visitors in 2025, representing a 14 per cent increase over 2024. Tourism foreign-exchange receipts reached 138 billion Moroccan dirhams, equivalent to approximately US\$14.7 billion.

Egypt also recorded a major increase, welcoming approximately 19 million tourists in 2025, representing a 21 per cent increase over the previous year. Tourism receipts were reported at about US\$17.8 billion.

Tunisia received more than 11 million tourists in 2025, generating approximately 8.096 billion Tunisian dinars in tourism receipts. Together, Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia welcomed about 49.8 million tourists in 2025, generating approximately US\$35.25 billion in tourism receipts.

South Africa also recorded a strong performance, with 10,498,506 international tourists visiting the country in 2025, according to Statistics South Africa. The country's total foreign arrivals, including same-day visitors and other travellers,

was higher.

The performance of sub-Saharan African destinations further demonstrates the economic importance of the industry.

Tanzania recorded 2,294,495 international tourist arrivals in 2025 and generated US\$4.41 billion in tourism earnings, an increase of 13 per cent over 2024.

Kenya recorded approximately 2.7 million international visitors in 2025, alongside 5.2 million domestic travellers. The country reported tourism earnings of about 500 billion Kenyan shillings, up from 452.2 billion shillings in 2024.

Ghana recorded 1,306,962 international tourist arrivals in 2025 and generated approximately US\$4.34 billion in tourism revenue. Domestic tourism also increased to about 1.79 million visits during the year.

These figures, the ATC said, demonstrate the scale of economic activity associated with travel and tourism and reinforce the need for African governments to give the sector greater policy attention and financial support.

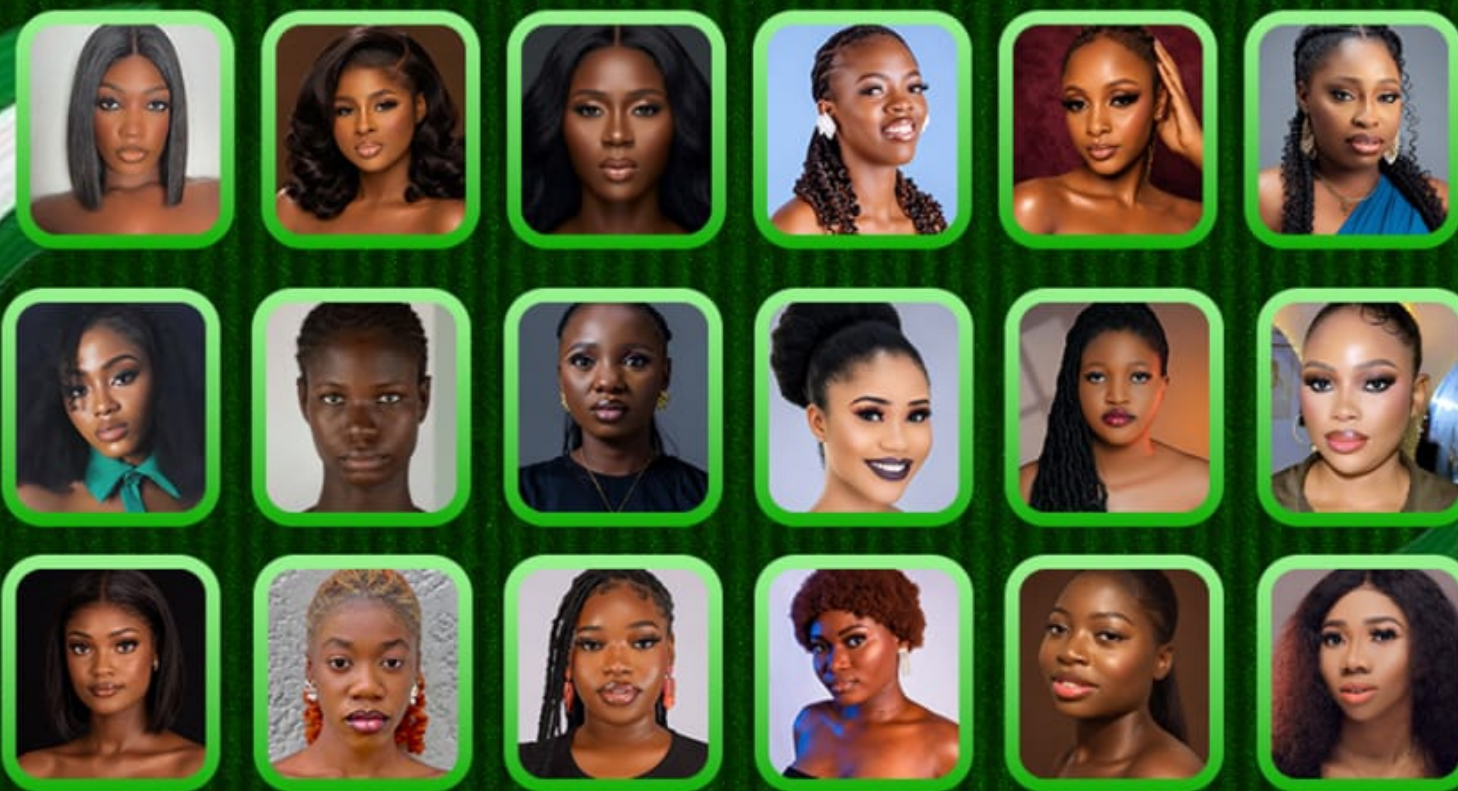
The Commission noted that the figures also illustrate why tourism should not be measured solely by international arrivals. Domestic tourism, visitor expenditure, employment, investment and the wider economic activity generated through the tourism value chain must also be taken into account.

The importance of travel and tourism to the global economy has continued to attract the attention of governments, international organisations and development institutions.

The World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTTC], through its Economic Impact Research, has consistently

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FACE OF INDEPENDENCE NIGERIA UNVEILS CONTESTANTS FOR 2026



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FACEOFINDEPENDENCEPAGEANT



FACEOFINDEPENDENCEHEROSAWARD



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Our objective is to develop girls who can become leaders, entrepreneurs, advocates, ambassadors and change-makers.

We want to create a platform where a contestant can come in as an aspiring queen and leave with greater confidence, knowledge, networks, exposure and opportunities.

We also want to use the platform to amplify issues affecting girls, young people and communities, while encouraging our queens to develop advocacy initiatives that create measurable social impact.

Ultimately, we want the crown to become a tool for purpose and service.

Are there plans for mentorship, entrepreneurship, advocacy, education or skills development?

Yes. Empowerment is an important part of our vision.

We are looking at creating opportunities for mentorship, entrepreneurship, leadership development, advocacy, financial literacy, communication, personal branding and skills development.

We also want to connect the contestants with

experienced professionals, business leaders, creatives and organisations that can help them understand how to turn their talents and ideas into sustainable opportunities.

The goal is not simply to prepare them for one night on stage. We are preparing them for life after the stage.

How does the platform intend to empower the eventual winners and other contestants beyond the competition?

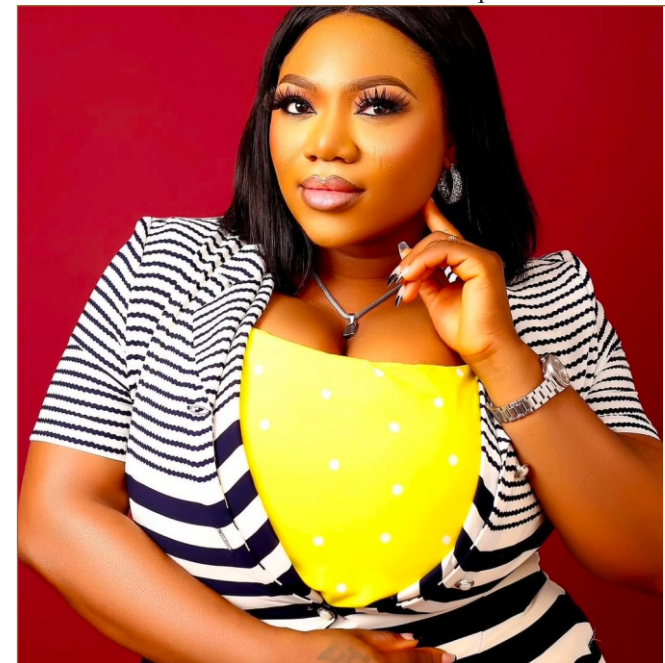
Winning the crown should be the beginning of the journey, not the end.

The eventual queens will have the opportunity to use the platform for advocacy, public speaking, brand partnerships, community projects and other initiatives aligned with the values of Face of Independence Nigeria.

But we also recognise that every contestant has value. Not everyone can wear the crown, but everyone can leave the platform better than they came.

We therefore want to create a strong Face of Independence alumni network and community where former contestants can continue to collaborate, access opportunities, support social causes and build meaningful relationships.

We also want to connect the contestants with



Barr. Catherine Oloidi

What role does the pageant play in promoting patriotism, culture and national unity?

Nigeria is incredibly diverse, and that diversity is one of our greatest strengths. Face of Independence brings together young girls from different states, cultures, ethnic backgrounds and experiences. When they come together under one platform, they demonstrate that despite our differences, we are one nation with a shared future.

We also use the platform to showcase Nigerian culture, fashion, music, award celebrations, creativity, food and heritage.

Patriotism, to me, is not simply saying that you love Nigeria. It is also about asking yourself, "What am I doing to make Nigeria better?"

That is the kind of patriotism we want to encourage.

How do you want the contestants to represent Nigeria?

I want them to represent Nigeria with confidence, dignity, intelligence, excellence and humility.

Whether a queen is travelling within Nigeria or representing the country internationally, she should be able to speak positively about our people and culture while also being honest about the challenges we face.

We want them to be women who understand that being a Nigerian ambassador means carrying our values, our culture and our possibilities with them.

They should be able to say, "This is who I am, this is where I come from, and this is what I can contribute."

Take us through the selection process. What are the criteria?

Our selection process is designed to look beyond physical appearance.

The first stage is the



Barr. Catherine Oloidi

audition, where contestants are assessed on their confidence, communication, personality, presentation and overall suitability for the platform.

We then look at qualities such as; intelligence and communication skills; confidence and stage presence; personality and character; knowledge of Nigeria and current affairs; cultural awareness and leadership potential as well as, sense of purpose.

There will also be opportunities for the contestants to demonstrate themselves through various stages of the competition.

Ultimately, we are looking for a woman who can carry the crown with grace but, more importantly, carry the responsibility that comes with it.

For us, the question is not simply, "Who is the most beautiful?" The question is, "Who is prepared to become a Face of Independence Nigeria?"

Finally, what would you say to organisations, brands and individuals

who may wish to support the pageant?

Face of Independence Nigeria Beauty Pageant and Hero's Award 2026 is open to partnerships and sponsorship opportunities.

We believe that initiatives of this nature require the support of organisations and individuals who share our vision of youth empowerment, national development, patriotism, culture and the promotion of Nigerian talent.

We welcome corporate organisations, government agencies, private-sector businesses, development partners and individuals who wish to associate with this important platform.

Partnership with Face of Independence Nigeria is an opportunity to support young women, promote positive national values and contribute to a celebration that brings beauty, talent, culture and purpose together.

We invite interested organisations and individuals to join us in building a platform that will not only celebrate a queen, but also inspire a generation.

Cont'd from page 6

highlighted the sector's contribution to GDP, employment and economic activity across countries and regions.

The industry supports a wide range of businesses, including airlines, airports, hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, tour operators, transport companies, cultural institutions and entertainment providers. Its economic impact also extends beyond direct tourism businesses to agriculture, manufacturing, construction, financial services and other sectors that supply goods and services to the tourism value chain.

For Africa, the economic potential of tourism is particularly significant because the continent possesses a rich combination of natural attractions, wildlife, cultural heritage, historic sites, beaches, festivals and traditional communities capable of supporting a diverse and sustainable tourism economy.

However, the ATC believes that these resources must be supported by effective policies, adequate investment and strong institutional commitment if they are to generate the desired economic and social benefits.

The Commission's position is that African countries must begin to place greater value on tourism's actual and potential contribution to their economies.

For decades, many African countries have relied heavily on agriculture, oil, minerals and other primary commodities. While these sectors remain important, tourism offers an opportunity to diversify

national income, attract foreign investment and create employment in both urban and rural communities.

In countries with established tourism industries, the sector supports hotels, restaurants, tour operations, transport services, cultural enterprises and thousands of small and medium-sized businesses.

In countries where tourism remains underdeveloped, the potential for growth is equally substantial, provided governments are willing to invest in the necessary infrastructure, services and human capital.

The ATC said the challenge is not the absence of tourism resources, but the failure in many instances to provide the support required to convert those resources into sustainable economic opportunities.

The Commission is therefore urging African governments to increase budgetary allocations to tourism authorities and ensure that adequate funds are available for destination promotion, tourism research, product development, training and the maintenance of visitor facilities.

"Tourism cannot be expected to contribute meaningfully to national development if governments are unwilling to invest in the sector," the Commission said.

For the ATC, funding for tourism marketing and promotion deserves particular attention.

The Commission believes that Africa cannot attract a greater share of the global



Dr. Lucky Onoriode George, Executive Director, African Travel Commission [ATC].

tourism market without sustained investment in destination branding, international promotion, digital marketing, trade fairs, market research and partnerships with airlines and travel businesses.

It also stressed the need for African countries to support domestic and intra-African tourism, which can help reduce dependence on long-haul international markets and strengthen regional economic cooperation.

For the Commission, the inadequate measurement of tourism's contribution to national economies is another issue that must be urgently addressed.

Tourism expenditure is distributed across several sectors, making it difficult to capture its full economic impact through conventional statistics alone.

A visitor may spend money on flights, accommodation, food, transportation, shopping, entertainment and cultural experiences. Each of these activities contributes to economic activity, generates income and supports employment.

The ATC believes that African countries must strengthen their tourism statistics and adopt internationally recognised methods of measuring the sector's contribution to GDP, employment, foreign exchange earnings, investment and other areas of economic activity.

Reliable data, it argued, would enable governments to make better-informed decisions about tourism policy, planning and funding.

It would also help tourism authorities

demonstrate the importance of their work to finance ministries, development institutions and the private sector.

The ATC's position is that tourism should be assessed not only by the number of international arrivals but also by domestic tourism, visitor expenditure, employment generation, investment and the wider economic activity associated with the industry.

The Commission is therefore calling for closer cooperation among tourism ministries, national statistical offices, central banks, immigration authorities and private-sector operators to improve the collection and analysis of tourism data.

The ATC also sees travel and tourism as a major opportunity to address unemployment, particularly among Africa's growing youth population.

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The sector offers opportunities in hospitality, aviation, travel management, tour guiding, transportation, event management, digital marketing, cultural entertainment and conservation.

Young people can also establish businesses in tourism-related services, including travel consultancy, destination content creation, tour operations, hospitality supply and digital tourism services.

However, the ATC believes that these opportunities can only be fully realised through sustained investment in education, vocational training, entrepreneurship and professional development.

It is therefore calling on governments and private-sector operators to work together to develop the skills required by the modern tourism industry.

The Commission has also stressed the importance of supporting women, young people and small and medium-sized enterprises that form a significant part of the tourism value chain.

According to the ATC, tourism development must go beyond attracting visitors to destinations. It must also ensure that local communities benefit from tourism-related economic activities.

This, it said, requires policies that encourage local sourcing, community-based tourism, cultural enterprises, small business development and the participation of local people in the tourism economy.

Beyond funding and statistics, the ATC sees connectivity as another major factor in the development of African tourism.

Visitors should be able to move easily, safely and affordably between African countries if the continent is to maximise the potential of intra-African tourism.

Air connectivity, road networks, rail systems, visa facilitation and efficient land-border procedures are all critical to the movement

federations and regional institutions is also essential if Africa is to maximise the opportunities presented by the sector.

The Commission believes that the development of regional tourism corridors, improved air links and more efficient land-border procedures

the continent to reassess the place of travel and tourism in their national development priorities.

The Commission believes that tourism must be treated as an investment rather than merely an expenditure and that its contribution to national economies must be properly

The Commission's message is that Africa cannot continue to celebrate its vast tourism resources without taking the practical steps required to develop and market them.

The 2026 World Tourism Day observance therefore provides an opportunity to move beyond celebration and focus attention on the policies, funding and partnerships required to transform Africa's enormous tourism potential into measurable economic and social benefits.

Travel and tourism is not merely about leisure and recreation. It is an industry that connects people and nations, creates economic opportunities, promotes cultural understanding, supports livelihoods and contributes to national development.

The ATC is calling for a renewed commitment to recognising and investing in the sector, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where tourism remains an important opportunity for economic diversification, employment creation and inclusive growth.

As Africa joins the rest of the world to mark World Tourism Day 2026 on 27 September, the Commission's message is clear: tourism must be valued, properly measured and adequately funded if it is to fulfil its potential as a driver of economic development and human progress.

The theme of this year's World Tourism Day celebration, as designated by UN Tourism, the United Nations specialised agency responsible for tourism, is “Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence to Redesign Tourism.” The international celebration will be hosted by El Salvador.



Shaikha Al Nuwais, Secretary-General, UN Tourism.

of tourists and business travellers.

The ATC said it would continue to advocate stronger cooperation among African countries to improve travel within the continent.

Better connectivity would encourage intra-African tourism, strengthen regional economic integration and enable visitors to combine several destinations in a single trip.

Greater collaboration among national tourism organisations, airlines, private-sector tourism

would help unlock the continent's tourism potential.

It also sees the removal of unnecessary barriers to travel as important to the growth of tourism, particularly among African countries seeking to attract visitors from neighbouring markets.

As World Tourism Day 2026 is marked on 27 September, the African Travel Commission is urging governments across

measured, recognised and reflected in government policy.

It also wants governments to provide the necessary funding to enable tourism authorities to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

For the ATC, the future of African tourism will depend largely on the willingness of governments to invest in infrastructure, marketing, research, skills development, connectivity and sustainable tourism development.



Barr. Catherine Oloidi, Executive Producer, Face of Independence Nigeria Beauty Pageant and Hero's Award..

Beauty, Patriotism And Purpose: Inside Face Of Independence Nigeria Beauty Pageant 2026

Barr. Catherine Oloidi, Executive Producer, Face of Independence Nigeria Beauty Pageant and Hero's Award 2026, in this interview with **Dr. Lucky Onoriode George**, Publisher/Editor, African Travel Times, speaks on the encouraging turnout at the auditions, the quality of contestants, youth empowerment, national unity and the search for Nigeria's next queen.

As Nigeria prepares to celebrate its Independence, the Face of Independence Nigeria Beauty Pageant and Hero's Award 2026 is positioning itself as a platform that goes beyond beauty, glamour and entertainment. The

initiative seeks to celebrate Nigerian history, patriotism, culture, leadership and talent, while promoting the empowerment of young Nigerian women.

Following the impressive turnout at the auditions, she discusses the quality and unique qualities of the contestants, the significance of staging the pageant around Nigeria's Independence celebration, and the role of the platform in nurturing future leaders.

She explains why Face of Independence Nigeria is not simply a beauty contest, but a platform designed to inspire confidence, promote national unity,

encourage personal development and empower young women to become ambassadors of Nigeria.

Barr. Catherine also highlights the opportunities available to contestants beyond the crown and calls for partnerships and sponsorship to support the vision of the pageant.

Excerpts:
African Travel Times: How would you describe the turnout at the auditions?
The turnout was very encouraging and, quite frankly, exceeded our expectations. We had young women from different backgrounds who came with confidence, ambition and a genuine desire to be part of something bigger than themselves.

What was particularly

impressive was the diversity of the applicants and the fact that many of them already had a vision of what they wanted to contribute to society.

For us, the turnout is a clear indication that young Nigerian girls are looking for platforms where they can express themselves, develop their talents and become part of conversations about the future of Nigeria.

What was the overall quality of contestants who presented themselves?

The quality was impressive. We saw contestants who were beautiful, articulate, intelligent, young, vibrant, talented and passionate. Some had backgrounds in entrepreneurship, entertainment, modelling, education, advocacy and other fields.

But beyond physical beauty, we were looking for character, confidence, intelligence, communication skills, purpose and leadership potential. We are not simply looking for a girl who can wear a crown; we are looking for a woman who understands the responsibility that comes with wearing one.

Were there any particular qualities that stood out among the applicants?

Absolutely. One thing that stood out was purpose. A number of the contestants came with personal stories and causes that were very inspiring.

We also saw resilience, confidence, creativity and a strong desire to make an impact. Some contestants demonstrated impressive knowledge of Nigerian history, while others are already building businesses or engaging in community initiatives.

That tells us that the Nigerian girl of today is not waiting to be given a seat at

the table. She is preparing herself to build the table.

What distinguishes Face of Independence Nigeria Beauty Pageant from other beauty contests in Nigeria?

Face of Independence is not just about beauty, glamour and entertainment. Our identity is deeply connected to Nigeria's history, the efforts of our heroes who fought for Nigerian independence, patriotism, nation-building and the empowerment of the African girl.

The crown is a responsibility. We want our queens to understand that beauty can open a door, but character, knowledge, competence and purpose are what keep you in the room.

Our contestants are challenged to develop themselves intellectually, socially and professionally, while understanding their role as ambassadors of Nigeria.

So, when we say Face of Independence, we are not simply talking about a beautiful face. We are talking about a girl who can represent the beauty, strength, diversity and potential of Nigeria.

Why is it important to stage the pageant around Nigeria's Independence celebration?

Nigeria's Independence is a significant moment for us as a people. It gives us an opportunity to reflect on where we have come from, where we are today and, importantly, the Nigeria we want to build.

The young people of today are the leaders, entrepreneurs, professionals, creatives and nation-builders of tomorrow. So, celebrating our independence through a platform that places young Nigerian girls at the centre of leadership, culture, talent and empowerment is very intentional.

We want the celebration to remind Nigerians that independence is not only about history; it is also about responsibility and the future.

Beyond beauty and entertainment, what does Face of Independence Nigeria Beauty Pageant seek to achieve?

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