

Meetings Africa: putting the business events sector to work

 By [Cari Van Wyk](#)

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South Africa is increasingly becoming a sought after business destination. Meetings Africa serves as a platform for the business events industry in showcasing South Africa and the rest of the continent's business events and tourism offering, further cementing the business tourism industry, contributing to overall economic growth and proving that "Africa is open for business". The South African National Convention Bureau, a division of Tourism South Africa, shared the lineup for [Meetings Africa 2016](#), 22 to 24 February, and spoke about how innovation is enabling growth in the industry.



Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo

We spoke to Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo, chief convention bureau officer at the South Africa National Convention Bureau about Meetings Africa 2016, what we can expect and the importance of the business tourism industry and its growth.

■ ***Tell us about Meetings Africa and what it hopes to achieve.***

Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo: Meetings Africa is a platform to grow the share of South Africa's business event market and to put the business events sector to work towards creating jobs, contributing substantially to economic growth.

When the trade show was first established, Meetings Africa's aim was to showcase South Africa as a Business Tourism destination, however over a decade later, Meetings Africa has since evolved and is now recognised as business events trade show that is truly representative of the African continent. This growth of Meetings Africa over the years can truly be attributed to a concerted effort of building more collaborations and partnerships within the business events industry. It is no wonder Meetings Africa is a multiple-award winning trade show having clinched the title of The Best Exhibition Show in five consecutive years as awarded by The Exhibition and Event Association of Southern Africa (EXSA).

■ ***Why is South Africa, and Africa, becoming an increasingly attractive business events destination?***

Kotze-Nhlapo: South Africa is a beautiful country capable of hosting big events as we have the infrastructure and warm and welcoming people. The 2015/16 results of the World Economic Forum's annual Global Competitiveness Index saw South Africa rise seven places from 56 to 49 of 140 countries. South Africa's business events industry has also seen a steady rise over the last years and has come full circle. If there ever was a time for event planners and buyers looking for an affordable, an accessible, unique and easy to do world-class destination outside of the ordinary, it is now. South Africa is that place.

■ ***Why is it important to keep building momentum in this regard and assure the world that South Africa is "open for business"?***

Kotze-Nhlapo: South Africa is leading from the front in continental collaboration and partnerships with the objective to grow the continent's business events industry and ultimately contribute in spearheading profound transformation of the African business event industry. Moreover Africa, increasingly now has a diverse offering of services and products which make it ideal for hosting business events. So, it is not just South Africa, but all of Africa is open for business - and that is what we are highlighting at Meetings Africa 2016. Our strategic positioning of Advancing Africa Together with our new campaign of 'Think African' emphasises our showcasing the best business events products and services that Africa has to offer.

The tide has turned for Africa in as far as business events industry is concerned. No other continent has the growth potential found here. According to ICCA there are 770 registered African Associations on the continent. 178 of these associations are based in South Africa and 592 on the rest of the continent. 218 regional conferences were registered on the continent in 2014, resulting in 610 events over the last five years. South Africa only hosted 63 of these events over the last five years.

The figures demonstrate that the growth opportunities for our country lie within the African market. Over the next five years, we will be investing in creating opportunities from this growth potential and utilising Meetings Africa as a strategic vehicle to unearth these opportunities for the country.

■ ***What are the major benefits the business events/business tourism industry has to offer to South Africa, particularly the economy?***

Kotze-Nhlapo: In 2014, South Africa hosted 124 international association conferences which attracted under 70,000 industry professionals to the country. Of the 124 conferences, 81% were international rotating events and only 9% African regional events. Looking ahead, the SANCB has secured 163 bids for South Africa between now and 2020. Collectively, these bids - spanning sectors in mining, health, agriculture - are expected to bring over 150,000 delegates to South Africa and contribute approximately R3.1 billion to the economy.

■ ***In which industries do you see the biggest growth with regards to business events?***

Kotze-Nhlapo: The business events industry is a great driver of economic development and South Africa's business events strategy is focused on building its knowledge economy and accelerating its macroeconomic benefits by attracting events in six identified economic sectors: manufacturing, mining metals, business process outsourcing, creative industries, life sciences and information and technology. These are directly linked to the government's National Development Plan. Of course, the travel and tourism industry as a whole will benefit.

■ ***What and who can we look forward to at Meetings Africa 2016?***

Kotze-Nhlapo: In the lead-up to this year's instalment of Meetings Africa, we will be holding the first ever European Cities Market (ECM) Summer School to take place outside of Europe. During this time, top global professionals will share knowledge and insights as well as latest business events trends in a bid to enhance more innovative ways of operating in a fiercely competitive global business events industry.

With the knowledge economy and innovation top on the agenda, Meetings Africa 2016 also boasts a high number of international and regional buyers under one roof. We are very thrilled by this. We have also been hard at work strengthening our partnerships across the Africa continent. To this end, international hosted buyers at Meetings Africa 2016 will get first-hand experience and they will see what the continent has to offer as they get to experience Africa under one roof.

On Sunday, 21 February, the African Society of Association Executives (AfSAE), which was launched at Meetings Africa 2015, will officially open its Johannesburg office in a ribbon-cutting ceremony with hosted buyers and stakeholders.

The first official day of the actual trade show (22 February) also known as BONDay (Business Opportunities Networking Day) features a variety of global, regional and local speakers imparting knowledge on an array of topics affecting the business events industry. BONDAY is designed to equip the industry, providing educational sessions for them to learn news trends and therefore further their business. BONDay is also about networking. Other events on BONDay include: IMEX-MPI-MCI Future Leader Forum Africa, AIPC Africa Summit, Business Events Associations Joint Conference, Event Greening Forum AGM, Corporate Business to Business Speed Marketing Sessions, Local Corporate Buyer Event

On the Tuesday, Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom will officially open the show, and in his address will set the tone for what Meetings Africa 2016 hopes to achieve. This will be followed by a panel discussion where the impact of a country's image on its business events industry will be discussed. The final day of Meetings Africa features the Green Stand Awards ceremony for the top green stands at Meetings Africa.

ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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