

# Potential bumper year for SA tourism

If the strong rebound in tourist arrivals in the first quarter of this year is any indication, the tourism sector in South Africa is in for a bumper year. Compared to the first quarter of 2015, arrivals for the first three months of 2016 grew by 18.7%.



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In March alone, the number of tourists who visited South Africa improved by 23.4%, compared to March 2015, according to the [Tourism and Migration Report](#) released by Statistics South Africa this week.

Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom said the persistent surge in arrivals boded well for the potential of tourism to stimulate a range of economic activity and create jobs across the industry’s diverse value chain. “The remarkable increase in arrivals recorded in March could be attributed to the Easter holiday falling in March this year while it was in April last year,” cautioned Hanekom.

“But the spectacular overall growth in tourism is part of a trend which started towards the end of last year and played out strongly during our high season. It shows that tourism in South Africa has the enduring capacity to support and grow our national economy. Our task now is to maintain the positive trend by improving our performance throughout the year.”

## Main source markets

The United Kingdom continued to be the main source of overseas arrivals in the first quarter of 2016. UK arrivals increased from 129,220 in 2015 to 147,639 in 2016, a growth of about 14.3%. Arrivals from China in the first quarter of this year grew by 65.2% compared to last year, and arrivals from India grew by 16.9% during the same period.

Minister Hanekom said the growth from China indicated that the decision of the South African Cabinet to implement a revised visa application process for China has paid off immensely. Accredited Chinese travel companies can now apply for visas on behalf of their clients, making the process much easier for travellers to South Africa.

“The current exchange rate has benefitted tourists from several source markets. They are finding incredible value in visiting South Africa,” said Hanekom.

## **Counter-seasonal marketing strategy**

“All spheres of government, our partners in industry, entrepreneurs and communities must continue working together to make the best of the bumper year we expect. The strong performance during peak season points to the great potential of attracting more visitors in different seasons throughout the year. SA Tourism and the industry are now working together on a counter-seasonal marketing strategy that is aimed at achieving this.

“Leaders in the tourism industry are working closely with government to accelerate tourism growth, its contribution to the national economy and the creation of more jobs in the future,” said Hanekom.

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