

# Sharing the benefits of tourism

By  Danette Breitenbach

6 Feb 2018

The upcoming Meetings Africa needs to be seen in the context of the contribution that tourism makes to the country and South African Tourism's (SAT) goal to attract five million tourists to the country.

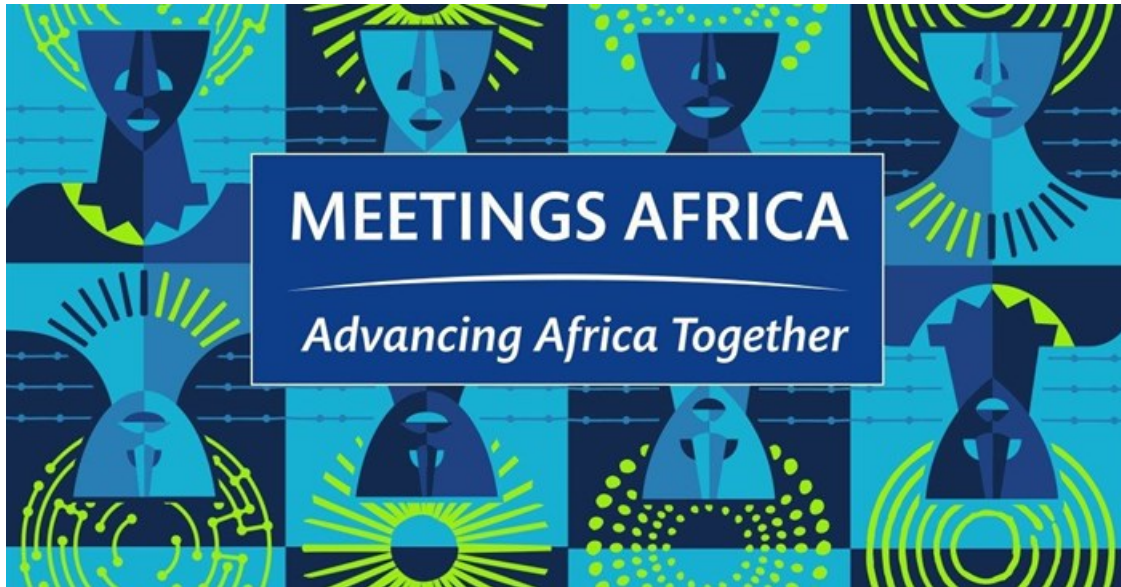


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With the 13th edition of the event taking place at the Sandton Convention Centre on the 27 and 28 February, SAT Chief Executive Officer, Sisa Ntshona, says the importance of Meetings Africa in terms of its contribution to the macro-economy of the country cannot be underestimated. "It serves to boost tourism revenue while driving employment."

Tourism is the world's third largest export sector. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) says 1.5 billion people travelled the world last year. 8% more people travelled to Africa, and 5% more to sub-Saharan Africa. In South Africa, tourism contributes R402bn to the GDP and 1.5 million jobs. It is one of the pillars of the National Development Plan (NDP).

## SA number one

Tourism is not only leisure, it is also business, with meetings contributing hugely to the industry. South Africa's conferences, meetings and events host one million business events delegates annually, creates 252,000 jobs, and contributes R115bn to the GDP.

South Africa is the number one destination for hosting international and regional meetings and conferences in Africa and the Middle East, surpassing even Dubai. It has hosted 211,000 meetings a year, according to SAT's three-year research study that was recently completed.

South Africa's success is demonstrated by its repeat hosting of events such as the Aids Society, which it has hosted twice in Durban, in 2006 and 2016 – the only city to also have achieved this is Washington DC in the United States. There were more than 16,000 people at that event, and we need more events like that.

## Shared economies

The theme of Meetings Africa 2018 is *Shared Economies*. "The role of the theme is to show how African entrepreneurs are creating economies of scale to compete globally. By leveraging each other's resources, we want to make our mark on a global scale," says Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo, the chief convention bureau officer.

"For exhibitors, this type of trade show is about exposing their business by meeting the regional, national and international buyers, and shared economies is a tool for collaborative African growth. The meetings sector is the one sector that is cooperative, not competitive. The key take-out is that shared economies drive intra-African trade and solutions."

## Changes

For the next five years, Sandton Convention Centre will be the home of Meetings Africa. It is, she says, the heart of the business world in South Africa, and even Africa.

"We have looked at how to grow Meetings Africa and make it bigger, and so we have cleaned out some of the frills and developed exhibition hall 2. This change is already reaping benefits, with an additional 100m<sup>2</sup> booked on last year."

The media centre has been moved to the mezzanine level overlooking exhibition hall 2. This dynamic space will also be the venue for our media talks. The business opportunity day continues, but this year it will be held in exhibition hall 2. With the continuing emphasis on SMMEs, the number of SMEs at the event has been increased. The Sustainability Village vendors have also been increased to 10.

A change she is very excited about is Networking Hour. "From 1pm to 2pm, we will be closing diaries so that exhibitors and buyers - who otherwise never get the time to interact with each other - can meet at the food court. We are creating a food truck type of environment, with healthy local South African food.

## ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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