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## Africa, tourism

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► [Africa](#) is the second largest continent (30 million km<sup>2</sup>) with 26,000 km of coastline (Fig. 1). It is also the second most populated continent with approximately one billion inhabitants unevenly distributed over 54 sovereign states.

Africa has been viewed as an exotic, distant, and challenging destination based on early colonial and missionary forays into the “dark continent.” Besides exoticism, the continent’s main appeals are its great diversity of natural landscapes and cultural richness. One of the principal tourism products is the safari—“to travel” in Kiswahili, and that in its nineteenth century roots meant a hunt for animals in the wild.

### History of tourism in Africa

Tourism development in the continent emerged in tandem with the nineteenth-century colonialism. ► [Egypt](#), ► [Morocco](#), ► [Tunisia](#), ► [Kenya](#),

► [South Africa](#), ► [Swaziland](#), and ► [Zambia](#) all experienced early development, mostly based on the desires of European and North American tourists. Africa’s imagery was connected to imperial explorations and expansion, the construction of “the native,” and in the Maghreb with notions of orientalism. Up to the 1950s, tourism growth was dependent on the limited ownership of automobiles by the white “European” elite, with unreliable road networks being nonetheless promoted by automobile clubs established in the early twentieth century (Pirie 2013).

From the 1930s, with the development of ► [aviation](#) networks from colonial centers of ► [power](#) in ► [Europe](#), ► [air transport](#) became an important channel for tourism growth (Pirie 2009). However even today, air transport is perceived as a major constraint to Africa’s tourism development. High airfares and inconvenient, unsafe, and insufficient service of scheduled and charter services are common problems in many countries.

### Growth and development

After Morocco’s and Tunisia’s independence in the 1950s and later of Kenya and ► [Tanzania](#), tourism was viewed as a “passport to development,” and ► [nature tourism](#) assumed an important role. During the 1990s, South African tourism grew considerably (94 % between 1990

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Africa, tourism, Fig. 1 Map of Africa

and 2002) and continued into the twenty-first century with mega-events and growth in convention-oriented ► **business tourism**. Today, safari remains a centerpiece of tourism

products in ► **Botswana**, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia, and trans-frontier ► **wild-life tourism** is expected to be a successful formula (Hottola 2009). On the other hand, ► **island**

tourism has also registered sustained above average growth in countries like ► [Cape Verde](#) (27 %), Reunion (12 %), and ► [Seychelles](#) (11 %). In 2009, 31 % of international tourists were Europeans, 43 % were Africans, and only 4 % were from the ► [Americas](#) (UNWTO 2011).

The main entry points are located in ► [South Africa](#), the resorts of Egypt and Tunisia, Casablanca, Addis Ababa, Nairobi, and Lagos. Road and ► [rail](#) networks at continental scale are inadequate, as they are at a national and regional scale in many countries. Port facilities are insufficient. While major international events such as the FIFA World Cup soccer tournament have spurred development in South Africa, other African countries have experienced far lesser tourism infrastructure investment.

Tourism is highly concentrated on a few destinations: South Africa (29 %) and Morocco (22 %) contribute about half of the total number of international arrivals. In 2012, the region enjoyed 52.4 million tourists (almost doubled since 2000), and the latest ► [UNWTO](#) forecasts that arrivals will increase from 85 million in 2020 to 134 million in 2030. One out of every 11 jobs comes from the tourism industry. Despite the positive development of the past years, Africa accounts for only 5 % of global tourism and for 3 % of receipts, which amounted to US\$ 1 billion (this figure was more than trebled since 2000). In 2012 the total contribution to GDP increased to 9 % and to 7.1 % of total employment (WTTC 2013). Tourism in North Africa, one of the most important regions in the continent (33 % of all international arrivals), has suffered a sizeable decline since the Arab Spring of 2011. Tunisia has been the most affected country in the region, with a loss of 31 % of international tourists from 2010 to 2011.

Several international and regional bodies such as UNWTO Commission for Africa, African Tourism Organization (sub-Saharan African non-profit organization formed in 2004), RETOSA (Regional Tourism Organization of Southern Africa), and NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) are concerned with tourism in the continent. Policies and strategies are mostly developed at a national level and tend to

mirror neoliberal development agendas that underline the role of the private sector and global competitiveness. These policies need to be further articulated with the sectorial policies, namely, education, nature conservation, health, and information and communication technologies.

## Future prospects

Future tourism facilitation measures should focus on improving ► [tourist](#) mobility through expedited visa procedures, cross-border development projects, and community involvement in tourism development (Dieke 2000). Africa's tourism potential is dependent largely on both regional economic development and advances in aviation technology, allowing for more cost-efficient and thus growing air access to (and within) the continent. Harnessing the potential of tourism in Africa as a developmental tool also requires education and skills training for the provision of quality tourism services. Prospects of a growing middle class due to broad-based economic growth underpin prospects for regional tourism growth based on inter-African tourism.

Perhaps due to Africa's diversity and size, most studies have been conducted at national or regional scale (East, Southern, and North Africa), with a strong predominance of studies related to South Africa and to a lesser degree to Southern Africa. Concerns over sustainability in tourism call for more research with respect to managing tourism growth in Africa while at the same time mitigating its potentially negative impacts. Many topics, such as inter-African tourism and gender inequality, are under-researched.

**See also** ► [Conservation](#), ► [cultural tourism](#), ► [development](#), ► [safari tourism](#), ► [sociocultural change](#).

## References

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