

South Africa's tourism momentum continues with a 48.9% increase in 2023

In a monumental surge, international tourist arrivals to South Africa for the period of January to December 2023 reached an impressive 8.5 million, boasting a remarkable 48.9% increase compared to the same timeframe in 2022.



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Africa takes the lead

South Africa emerged as a prime destination, welcoming 6.4 million visitors from across the African continent, constituting a substantial 75.6% of all arrivals. Zimbabwe and Kenya particularly shone, with Zimbabwe experiencing a notable 70.8% increase in arrivals to South Africa, totaling 2.1 million visitors. Meanwhile, Kenya recorded a staggering 99% surge, reaching 42,403 arrivals for the January to December 2023 period.

Americas contributing strong momentum

Tourist arrivals from the Americas demonstrated robust growth, registering at 455,901, reflecting a significant 39.8% increase compared to the corresponding period in 2022. The United States of America led the pack with 353,975 arrivals, marking a substantial 35% growth from 2022.

European markets showcase strength

South Africa experienced a surge in European tourist arrivals, totaling 1.2 million for January to December 2023, representing a 38.2% increase compared to the same period in 2022. The United Kingdom remained the top European source market, contributing 356,160 tourists and showing a commendable 25.8% growth. Germany followed closely with a remarkable 41.6% increase, bringing in 245,259 tourists. The Netherlands and Russia also exhibited impressive growth, with increases of 45.5% and 74.7%, respectively.

Asia markets display noteworthy growth

The Asian markets demonstrated significant growth, contributing a total of 199,308 arrivals, showcasing an outstanding 69.1% increase from the same period in 2022. India led the way with 79,774 tourists, marking a 43.7% growth, while China experienced a massive surge of 204.9%, with 37,164 arrivals in 2023.

Robust gains in the Middle East

The Middle East witnessed a robust increase, with 54,339 arrivals in the January to December 2023 period, reflecting a substantial 33.7% growth compared to the corresponding period in 2022. Notably, South Africa received 16,351 arrivals from Saudi Arabia, marking a noteworthy 42.6% increase, while the United Arab Emirates saw a remarkable 110% increase with 6,511 arrivals compared to 2022.

South Africa's tourism industry celebrates these unprecedented figures, highlighting the nation's growing allure on the global stage.

Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille expressed delight at the impressive numbers from the African continent and highlighted the strategic decisions that contributed to the growth in specific markets.

She said: "Kenya's remarkable performance can be attributed to the strategic decision by government to simplify the visa regime in 2023 as well as targeted and effective insights-driven marketing campaigns."

"This recovery can be attributed to consistent efforts to showcase South Africa as a welcoming, responsible tourism destination, highlighting experiences that align with intrepid, green economy conscious travellers," the Minister said.

Minister de Lille emphasised the charm and magnetism of South Africa as a tourism destination, with specific mention of the reopening of the Chinese market and the resumption of direct flight routes in 2023.

Looking ahead, Minister de Lille emphasised the need to unlock barriers such as visa regulations and limited air access and airlift for sustained growth.

The Minister also expressed commitment to working with partners and government colleagues to facilitate policy and regulation revisions.

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