

What to expect when travelling to these top business destinations in Africa, Middle East

Africa is often touted as the emerging market story of the next decade. Before the pandemic hit, the World Economic Forum even predicted that if Africa could sustain and accelerate structural reforms, and the continent could emulate China's rapid rise over the last 50 years. McKinsey predicted \$5,6tn in African business opportunities by 2025.



Source: Supplied

Even though the pandemic threw a spanner in the works, South Africans continue to turn their eyes to the continent for business opportunities.

Bonnie Smith, GM, FCM South Africa, explains that FCM customers are keen to take to the road again to explore new opportunities for growth, especially now that the vaccination drive has gained momentum and travel has become more accessible.

“As more destinations open up, we are seeing a want and a need to get back to travelling. Getting around the African continent and to the Middle East is particularly important for our customers, as they want to check in on their regional offices in person,” she says.

But while companies and travellers are looking forward to getting back on the road, many of them are still expressing safety concerns. To help customers determine if they are ready to resume business travel into the continent, FCM gathered reports from its country managers in Africa and the Middle East on what business travellers can expect on the ground.

Ghana

Ghana has emerged as a hub for South African companies doing business in West Africa. The country has taken several measures to become more appealing to international investors and to encourage local business development.

For business travellers arriving in Ghana, things will look a bit different as compared to before the onset of the Covid pandemic, explains Glory Brisbane, FCM country manager for Ghana. However, it's not a bad change, she assures travellers.

Says Brisbane: "As you get off the plane, you are met by the health officials who check your health forms. You then move onto the bank to pick up your receipt for the online payment for your Covid test. If you didn't pay in advance, you can still make payment. With the receipt, you go to the test cubicles for your test samples. The process is seamless and fast. Then, you go through immigration after which you can claim your bags.

"Once you have collected your bags, you go to the waiting area for a copy of your test results. This could take up to 30 minutes, depending on how busy the airport is. If you're Covid-negative, you'll be on your way. If you test positive, you'll be taken to a dedicated hotel where you'll be retested on Day 3."

Need to know:

- Covid protocols are strictly observed with most people wearing masks.
- Restaurants are open for business.
- There is an emergency number available online www.ghanahealthservice.org. +233 558439868.

South Africans will need to carry the following to travel to Ghana:

- Proof of payment for the Covid-19 test at Kotoka International Airport (KIA), Accra. This can be done on <https://myfrontierhealthcare.com/Home/Ghana>
- A paper copy of a negative Covid-19 test not older than 72 hours from the time of departure
- A completed Ghana Health Form

Kenya

The 2020 World Travel Awards (WTA) named Nairobi as Africa's leading Business Travel Destination, putting Kenya on the map for corporates.

Grace Gitonga, FCM key account manager in Kenya, says she has seen a substantial recovery in Kenya's business travel since the reopening of the country in August last year. "There was a drastic decline in April 2021 when the country was facing its second lockdown, but travel has since regained momentum."

Niche business sectors such as peacekeeping missions and breweries are leading the recovery as well as telco and FMCD industries. Conferencing is also picking up, especially in the counties. Overall, the country's business travel is at 30% to 40% of pre-pandemic levels.

South African travellers who visit Kenya on business can expect strict Covid protocols with the general public being compliant to the guidelines. She warns that the health care system in the country is generally stretched. Accessing special Covid care like oxygen and getting ICU admission may be a challenge depending on the infection rate.

Need to know:

- Masks are required, social distancing is observed and there are frequent reminders for people to wash their hands.
- A national curfew is in place from 04.00-22.00
- Restaurants and entertainment areas are open for business travellers to enjoy.

South Africans will need to carry the following to travel to Ghana:

- A negative PCR-based Covid-19 test conducted within 96 hours prior to arrival.
- A QR code for a completed Travelers Health Surveillance Form which can be accessed on the website.



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Egypt

Egypt is often seen as Africa's number one investment destination. The country is known for its high education level, low operating costs, and governmental efforts to support businesses.

Egyptians have a relatively laid-back attitude when it comes to Covid regulations, says Aya Fouad, GM FCM Egypt. "You can rarely find Egyptians wearing masks outdoors and in the streets. However, in some indoor places like supermarkets, banks, malls a wearing a mask is obligatory," she says.

Business travel has recovered for most, depending on the field and size of business and corporate. "SMEs are being more agile in their return to travel. The larger the company structure, the more complicated it gets. Travel budgets are also higher with mainly senior management travelling as opposed to more junior employees," says Fouad.

The oil and gas industry is leading the corporate travel recovery in Egypt as well as the construction industry and the IT industry.

South Africans will need to carry the following to travel to Egypt:

- A negative PCR test not older than 72 hours with a QR code
- For vaccinated travellers: a vaccination certificate with QR code

Nigeria

Adejoju Sikuade, FCM country manager for Nigeria, explains business travel is thriving and restaurants are open if you want to take clients out on a business lunch or dinner.

Sikuade explains Nigerians are social people. "We crave human interactions and we're seeing a shift from virtual to more face-to-face meetings," she says.

Especially the energy and health sectors are leading the way in business travel recovery in Nigeria. Crew members in the energy sector need to be on-site while in the health sector we're seeing a growing demand for medical supplies.

Need to know:

- Travellers need to self-isolate for 7 days upon arrival in the country. On day 7, they need to take a Covid-19 PCR test.
- Masks are required and social distancing is observed.

South Africans will need to carry the following to travel to Nigeria:

- A negative Covid-19 PCR test (taken at most 72 hours before departure).
- Proof of payment for your COVID test in Nigeria (to be obtained on <https://nitp.ncdc.gov.ng/onboarding/homepage>)
- A QR code (to be obtained on <https://nitp.ncdc.gov.ng/onboarding/homepage>)

UAE

The UAE market has seen a steady improvement in business travel in the region and is currently at about 30% of pre-pandemic business travel volumes. Especially the energy, oil, gas, marine and mining sectors have picked up and are steadily growing, according to Ciarán Kelly, GM FCM Middle East & Africa.

With the UK recently classifying the UAE as amber in the traffic light system, there has been a surge in demand for flights to the UK. This will positively impact the region's recovery moving forward, says Kelly.

In terms of vaccinations, the UAE has made positive strides with 75% of the population now double jabbed. "This has significantly improved traveller confidence," says Kelly.

Need to know:

- A valid hard copy of a negative Covid-19 PCR test certificate with a QR code issued within 48 hours prior to departure is required, or
- A rapid PCR test report with a QR code conducted at the departure airport within six (6) hours prior to departure.

Qatar

Qatar has been hard hit by the pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns. Until January this year, the country was at 5% of pre-pandemic travel levels, with only repatriation flights taking place. From February, however, things started improving, according to Shafiq Nasiruddin. The main reason for the turnaround was the news of the Fifa World Cup being held in Qatar in 2022. Besides the Fifa World Cup, also the oil and gas industry has started generating business travel again.

With 70% of the population in Qatar fully vaccinated, travel confidence is increasing significantly. Still, Nasiruddin explains flexibility has become increasingly important for business travellers which is why FCM has spoken to Qatar Airways to negotiate flexible fares.

Need to know:

- Entry is restricted for unvaccinated travellers
- All travelers must have a negative Covid-19 PCR test result. The test must be taken from an accredited Covid-19 testing centre a maximum of 72 hours before arrival in Qatar.

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