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Southern Africa Tourism Industry: Recent Trends and Future Prospects

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Abstract *The past four decades saw the Southern Africa being the fastest growing tourism region in the world according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). This study reviews the development and growth of the tourism industry in Southern Africa informed by the UNWTO`s latest tourism statistical data affirming that Africa has had above average growth in tourism. The tourism sector is one of the most significant industries in numerous Southern African countries. This study confirmed that the compelling need for economic diversity, employment creation, generation of foreign currency, and the general improvement in people`s living standards are the variables at the epicentre of the unprecedented growth of tourism in Southern Africa sub-region. Results further identified commissioning of regional tourism assets, hosting of high profile global events, and use of superior tourism marketing campaigns as linchpins in the resurgence of tourism within the region. The study recommends randisation of the region, speed conclusion of the envisaged customs union and expediting the much vaunted universal-visa system as precursors to scaling up regional tourism into unprecedented heights. The study`s conclusion points to a promising future with the region tipped to lead by the measure of market share and aggregate arrivals.*

Keywords: *Southern Africa, Tourism Industry, Trends, Prospects*

INTRODUCTION

The tourism phenomenon has arguably become a global activity worth billions of dollars. The international tourism sector's value was in excess of US$1.2 trillion in 2011 (UNWTO, 2012). Globally, tourism currently ranks fourth after fuels, chemicals and food. For many developing countries tourism is the main source of foreign exchange income, and the number one export category, creating the much needed foreign exchange income and opportunities for development. To date, the sector has consolidated its growth despite facing multiple challenges in the broader macro environment. Worldwide tourism phenomenon continue to rebound from the setbacks of 2008-2009, in a period marked by persistent economic turbulence, major political upheavals in Middle East and north Africa, and the natural disaster in Japan. These setbacks have produced losers and winners in the international tourism jungle. Despite all these tourism humps, over time an increasing number of destinations have opened up and invested in tourism development, turning modern tourism into a key driver of socio-economic progress through export revenue, the creation of jobs and enterprises, and infrastructure development. The long haul forecast of tourism points to a substantial potential for further growth. According to Tourism Towards 2030, the number of international tourist arrivals worldwide is expected to increase by an average of 3.3% a year over the period 2010 to 2030. At the projected pace of growth international tourist arrivals worldwide exceeded 1 billion in 2012, and will reach 1.8 billion by the year 2030. More importantly, international tourism in emerging economy destinations in the way of Asia Pacific, Africa and Middle East will grow at double the pace (4.4%) a year of advanced economy destination.

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) tourism statistics indicate that the international tourism industry will therefore continue to grow from strength to strength. From 70 million international tourists in the year 1960, the number reached 710 million in the year 2000. It is further projected by the WTO that international tourism arrivals world-wide would reach 1.5 billion by the year 2020 (WTO Tourism Vision 2020). The economic imprints of the number of tourism traffic globally are enormous. According to the World

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Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in the year 1999, the industry generated $3.5 trillion of the GDP and an almost 200 million jobs across the world economy. According to Bhatia (2001: 37), who is supported by Cooper *et al* (2001) "...tourism represents one of the world`s largest industries with nearly 700 million estimated international visitor arrivals in the year 2000". This phenomenon today has become a very complex activity encompassing a wide range of relationships. The economic benefits to a country by way of earning foreign exchange are the prime motive for various nations to promote tourism.

Improved living standards in developed countries and widespread introduction of the holiday with pay to a large majority of people played a catalytic role in giving a new impetus to international tourism in the post world war II period (Cooper *et al*, 2001; Lockwood and Medlik, 2001; Harrison, 1998; Weaver and Oppermann, 2000). Coupled with the above, the attainment of politically stable environment and increase in discretionary income redefined the complexion of tourism in the Southern Africa region. According to Bhatia (2001:20) "Tourism and its development are closely interrelated to consumer `s purchasing power on the one hand and peace and prosperity on the other." Income is therefore the second most important variable in the evolution of international tourism after leisure; it forms an important factor in influencing tourism as well as participation in recreational pursuits. The more affluent members of the society are the more they travel the most (Cooper *et al*, 2001; Harrison, 1998; Weaver and Oppermann, 2000). As the global economy surges, resulting in improvements in standard of living and disposable income coupled with more leisure time, the overall number of tourists are expected to grow further. Factors like availability of cheaper and convenient transport; fewer or no restrictions on travel, availability of a mass of information on various destinations and newer marketing techniques, the contribution from tourism to world economy and overall number of tourists are expected to grow further. These tourists in their turn spend trillions of dollars in the host countries visited during their travel, resulting in great increase in economic activity.

Bhatia (2001) asserts that the international tourism industry is conveniently divided into tourism regions which are namely: Europe which is pre-eminent and the world`s focus of international tourism and the world`s primary destination region. Second in importance is North America, which is an equally significant world tourism region in terms of volume of tourist movement, whose general pattern of tourism development show striking similarities with those of Europe. The Pacific region is the third most significant region by the measure of market share and aggregate arrivals. This region is the world`s most rapidly growing tourist region since it is an emerging market. Sub-Saharan Africa and Middle East are the other regions placed on the 4th and 5th rung by the WTO in terms of rankings. These two regions according to available tourism data are peripheral in terms of their economic relationships with the developed world and in terms of their tourist linkages with the major Western tourist generating regions (Cooper *et al*, 2001; Boniface and Cooper, 2001, Harrison; 1998). These two regions continue to play second fiddle to developed countries whose tourist industries are always in a sparkling form. However, on a positive note, the Southern Africa sub-region has in the recent past emerged as the main benefactor of the yester year setbacks stifling tourism growth. On the pole side is the north Africa that has been a net loser due to political skirmishes punctuating it. It is the purpose of this study to unpack how Southern Africa has fared with such exceptional dexterity in spurring tourism growth within the sub-region. Projections for future trends and areas and issues in need of attention on the part of member countries constituting Southern Africa would be highlighted

GENERAL WORLDWIDE OUTBOUND TOURISM TRENDS

Tourism can be deemed one of the most remarkable socio-economic phenomena of the 20th century. From being an activity enjoyed by only a small group of relatively well-off people during the first half of the last century, it gradually became a mass phenomenon during the post –World War II period, notably from the 1970s onwards (Neto, 2003; Boniface and Cooper, 2001; Lockwood and Medlik, 2002; Bhatia, 2001). Tourism now encompass a growing number of people through-out the globe and accounts for a significant share of economic output in both developed and developing countries. In the context of this study, international tourism is comprehended as that movement of tourists that straddles the boundaries of defined tourism regions, for example, a holiday vacation from Europe to Asia Pacific. Interest groups such as the WTTC now mention that tourism is the world`s single largest industry accounting in 1998 for about one of every ten jobs, and about 6 per cent of all economic activity (WTTC, 1998). In dollar terms, this amounts to about $8 trillion.

The tourism industry has been dominated by traditional giants like Western Europe, North America and Japan since the industry took off in earnest in the 1950s. To date, the emergence of emerging markets fronted by the young economies in East Asia Pacific has had visible imprints on the global tourism landscape. UNWTO statistical data proffered confirm a shift in terms of market dominance with The Americas poised to be overtaken by the EAP in the period post 2010. The rapid economic development currently obtaining in a number of Asian countries notably China, South Korea, India, Indonesia and the ever sparkling Japanese economy coupled with other Asian Tigers have redefined the contours of the global tourism phenomenon. UNWTO`s Tourism 2020 Vision forecast global tourism traffic to breach the 1.6 billion mark from a modest figure of 23.5 million in 1950. The EAP would account for a 23.4% market share which translate to a massive 374, 400, 000 visitors against a paltry 25300, that is, 1 per cent of 25.3 million global arrivals. In sharp contrast, the Americas is forecast to account for 14.9% market share, which is 238, 400, 000 in the year 2020 against 29.6%, which translates to 7, 488, 800 actual arrivals in the year 1950. The quickened rhythm and pace of the tourism phenomenon in tourist destinations mainly in the EAP, and Africa in the other hand and the sluggish and loss of market share by tourist destinations in Europe and The Americas could point to a phenomenon that has reached the development phase of Butler`s tourist area life cycle (TALC) of 1980 whilst on the other hand it points out to an industry that has matured and reached the ceiling, that is, consolidation stage of the TALC. The former characterise youthful tourism industries in emerging markets whereas the latter relates to tourist destinations which have been dominating the international tourism industry since its watershed period of the 1970s. Table 1 below seeks to show the changing regional picture in terms of tourist destinations` arrivals, and confirm that the EAP tourist destination is poised to upset the apple cart.

The tourist generation is particularly closely tied or related to economic circumstances, and that tourist generation on a world scale is heavily concentrated in Europe, North America and to some extent in the Pacific region. There is a positive relationship between the performance of the world`s economy and the generation of international tourist travel. This relationship also holds good at the destination level. As Bhatia aptly puts it (2001:37) "... a country `s ability to generate tourism is related to its social, political and economic characters." Each country goes through a clearly defined sequence of phases of tourist generation from phase 1 when only a tiny elite travel abroad , through phase 2 and 3 when first mass domestic and then mass out bound tourism develops, and through to phase 4 when, finally, the proportion of the population travelling abroad is greater than holidaying at home. These phases occur in parallel with economic and political change taking place in the country. Different destinations of the world are at different stages of economic development and tourist generation. The countries of the affluent economies core currently generate the vast majority of the world`s international and domestic tourists. The rapid pace at which tourism has expanded over the past decades especially the decades following World War II, clearly showed the importance of this sector of activity from an economic point of view. Today there can be little doubt that tourism has assumed considerable economic and social significance globally. The various benefits especially the economic benefits which the large number of tourists brings to the host countries have made these countries spend huge sums of money to develop infrastructure and other facilities (Weaver and Oppermann, 2000). It is a recognised fact that the developed countries in Western Europe, North America are the ones which are major areas for international tourism and are, therefore the principal receivers of economic advantage. However, as a result of constant growth of tourism to developed countries, especially Asia, and Pacific, these countries are also getting considerable economic benefits from international tourism (French, 1991; Watkins, 1991).

The most important economic factor associated with an increased demand for tourism is the level of affluence in a particular country. In general, the scope and volume of tourism increases as society becomes more economically developed and as more discretionary household income is subsequently made available to an even widening portion of the population (Weaver and Oppermann, 2000). Tourism is fundamentally dependent on the freedom of people to travel both internationally and within their own countries often restricted for political and economic resources.

According to the latest figures compiled by the UNWTO, foreign exchange earnings from international tourism reached a peak of USD476 billion in 2000, which was by far larger than the combined export value of automobiles,

International tourist arrivals by region, 1950-forecast of 2020

Region	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Europe	16.8m	50.2m	112.5m	194.8m	288.7m	381.4m	471.8m	752m
The Americas	7.4m	16.7m	36.7m	53.8m	85.5m	121.4m	174.8m	238.4m
Asia Pacific	.253m	.9m	5.7m	22.2m	55m	112.8m	217m	387.2m
Africa	.5313m	.7m	2.3m	7.1m	15.4m	21.1m	41.3m	99.2m
Middle East	.02277m	.6m	2.2m	6.8m	9.5m	17.8m	32.9m	49.6m
Global	25.3m	69.3m	159.7m	284.8m	457.3m	696.7m	940m	1.6 bn

Source: WTO Tourism Barometer; Medlik and Lockwood, (2001).

oil products, telecommunications (WTO, 2001a). Ever-since international tourism took off in earnest in the period post world war 2 riding on the back of the so-called boom factors, the industry has been on an upward trend weathering setbacks such as major international political and economic crises like the Gulf War, Asian financial crisis, September 11 terrorist attacks, Asian Tsunami, SARs outbreak, Bali and Mumbai bombings, and Icelandic ashes. Latest UNWTO figures show that the turn of the millennium recorded one of the most impressive annual growth rates in international tourism history. In the medium and long haul, international tourism is expected to resume its rapid growth buoyed by the rising living standards and discretionary incomes- a phenomenon punctuating the Southern Africa region, falling real costs of travel, expansion and improvement of various transport modes, increasing amounts of free time- a trend currently emerging among Southern Africa member countries, and other factors. The above buttresses the UNWTO`s long-haul projections of an average yearly growth rate in global arrivals of over 4% in the period up to 2020. Going by such forecasts the number of international arrivals reached the striking mark of 1 billion in the year 2010 and expected to reach 1.6 billion by 2020 (WTO, 2001d).

Overview of Tourism Development in Southern Africa

According to Rogerson (2009) the decade between 2000 to 2010, saw Southern Africa region standing at the threshold of a new era. The massive international media coverage of 2010 FIFA World Cup and opening up of peace parks, created an interest in this part of the world on a scale never seen before. In view of this time of opportunity it is appropriate to consider the developments that have taken place in the tourism industry over the last decade, and to extrapolate on the possible reaction of the international tourism market as a sequel to the region`s successful hosting of the world`s most spectacular event. The situation obtaining on the ground indicates that the international tourism market is keen to see and experience the SADC region. Apart from the opportunities that the Southern Africa`s recognition offers, the industry will also have to contend with revenue leakages and how to increase the average spending per visitor and enhancing the accessibility of the region.

Tourism`s potential contribution to development has become especially important because of Sub-Saharan Africa`s declining economic performance. Many African countries on aggregate initially tried to develop economically by expanding and increasing the range of primary exports from agriculture and mining. When this did not provide satisfactory results, Africa turned to industrialisation as a road to quick and sustainable economic growth (Reid, 1998). Conversely, contemporary Africa`s endemic economic stagnation and poverty suggest that these strategies have not worked for the continent. It is against this backdrop that attention has shifted and focused on tourism`s contribution to development given the continent`s vast natural and artificial tourism resources (de Kadt, 1976; Gamble, 1989; Summary, 1987). Southern Africa falls under the least developed countries indexation (LDCs) and many factors account for the emergence of the less developed world as an increasingly important inbound tourist destination. Globally, the tourist market is sensitive to the existence of social or political instability within destinations, given the in situ nature of consumption within the sector. The negative effect of instability on tourism, moreover, is not necessarily confined to the actual war zone or to the period of actual conflict. Richter and Waugh (1986) have demonstrated the destabilising impacts of the Sri Lankan civil war upon tourism in India and the Maldives, and the war in Afghanistan on tourism in Pakistan. In Zambia, the development of tourism in the 1970s and 1980s was severely curtailed by the liberation wars prevailing in adjacent states during that period (Teye, 1986, 1991; Sharpley, *et al*, 1996). As a region Africa has a high discrepancy between population share and stay-over share. According to Ankomah and Crompton (1990), this underrepresentation can be accounted for by several factors, including a persistently negative image of Africa in the tourist market, foreign exchange constraints, chronic political instability and concerns over personal safety due to high crime rates and widespread infectious diseases (Weaver and Elliot, 1996). Countries receiving more than one million stay-over’s are located in the extreme north, for example, the pleasure periphery destination of Tunisia and Morocco or in the extreme south, that is, South Africa and Zimbabwe, where relative sub-regional prosperity fuels robust intra-regional travel.

Tourism Trends for Selected Southern Africa Countries

Tourism is the second largest economic sector in Sub-Saharan Africa after mining and is recognised as a major stimulus to the economy (WTTC, 2007). In Zimbabwe tourism reached its peak in 1998 when arrivals breached the 2 million mark. Wildlife based tourism is considered as the most appealing form of land use in Southern African countries (Barnes, 2001; Bennett, 1996). It follows that trophy-animal hunting, for example, elephant and buffalo accrue high revenue for safari hunters and provide income for the rural resident communities in Southern Africa (Gujadhur, 2001; Mbaiwa, 2003; Thakadu *et al*, 2006).

Tourism has evolved during the latter half of the 20th Century from a marginal and locally significant activity to a widely dispersed economic giant, which in 1999 accounted for some 6 per cent of the global economy. This places tourism roughly on the same order of magnitude as agriculture or mining. According to the WTTC, the tourism sector now accounts directly and indirectly for more than 200 million jobs world-wide.

If origin governments can be compared with a safety valve that releases energy into the tourism system, then destination governments can be likened to safety valves that control the amount of energy absorbed by the destination components of that system. This is especially true at the international level, where national governments establish the conditions under which inbound tourists are allowed entry. To a greater or lesser extent, countries exert control over the arrival of tourists by requiring visas or passports from potential visitors, and restricting the number of locations through which access to the country can be gained (Weaver and Oppermann, 2000). Most Southern Africa countries in principle and practice encourage tourist arrivals because of the associated generation of foreign exchange. In addition, destination governments also explicitly influence the development and management of their tourism products through the establishment of tourism-related agencies. These include tourism ministries that are concerned with overall policy and direction, and tourism boards, which focus on tourism marketing. The Table below detail out tourist arrivals and receipts for Southern Africa countries.

Trends in the Tourist Arrivals in Selected Southern Africa countries: 2009-2012

Economic Significance of Tourism in Southern Africa

Tourism plays a major role in boosting the economies of most developing countries in Africa. According to Neto (2003; World Bank, 1989), tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world and it is an increasingly important source of income, employment and wealth in many countries. Numerous African countries have begun to realise the limited success of agricultural exports due to the anthropogenic climate change and developmental pressures and have so far shifted their focus to tourism as a new source of growth. Tourism has become the most popular land-use tool and a rural development strategy in Africa in general, and in Southern Africa in particular, where it has contributed to job creation, income generation and promoted the conservation of natural resources and improved living standards of remote-rural area communities. The economy of Southern Africa has prospered for decades buoyed by vast mineral resources especially diamonds and copper-nickel (Mariki *et al*, 2011). Overdependence on a single non renewable resource like diamonds led the region to embrace tourism as an alternative development strategy. The growing pressure to diversify the economy is turning the focus to tourism, which currently is one of southern Africa`s fastest growing economic sectors.

As postulated by Boniface and Cooper (2009), Lockwood and Medlik (2001), Richter, (1992), and Copper *et al* (2001)

Table 2

Country	Arrivals 2009	Arrivals 2010	Arrivals 2011	Arrivals 2012	Receipts for 2011	Receipts for 2012
South Africa	7,012,000	8,074,000	8,339,000	9,188,000	10, 707 m	11, 201m
Zimbabwe	2,017,000	2,239,000	2,423,000	1,794,000	664 m	749 m
Namibia	980000	984000	1,027,000	998000	645 m	640m
Mozambique	1,461,000	1,718,000	1,902,000	2,113,000	266 m	289 m
Angola	366000	425000	481000	528000	653 m	711 m
Botswana	2,103,000	2,145,000	2,230,000	1,201,00	36 m	30 m
Malawi	755000	746000	767000	679000	39 m	38 m
Zambia	710000	815000	920000	859000	146 m	155 m
Tanzania	695000	754000	843000	1,043,000	1, 383 billion	1,605 billion
Lesotho	320000	414000	397000	422000	29 m	46 m
Swaziland	928000	1,078,000	879000	1,093,000	25m	27m
Madagascar	163000	196000	225000	256000	28m	30m
DRC	53000	81000	186000	-	11,4 m	6.9 m
Mauritius	871000	935000	965000	965000	1,808 billion	1,778 billion
Seychelles	158000	175000	194000	208000	-	-

Source: World Bank, ZTA, 2010; 20013.

international tourism arrivals and departures are concentrated in relatively few countries mainly in western Europe, North America and Japan. The travel and tourism industry in Africa has for a very long time played a peripheral role or second fiddle to the so-called developed world as evidenced by the region`s market share of 4.4 per cent and a projected forecast share of 6.2 per cent in the year 2020 (UNWTO, 2008; UNWTO Tourism 2020 Vision).

In Africa, the direct contribution made by the tourism sector to GDP was around US$77 billion in 2011, whereas the direct contribution to employment was projected to be 7.8 million jobs. Adding the indirect and induced impacts would mean a total economic contribution of the tourism industry in the region of some US$171 billion in GDP and 18.2 million jobs. Leading country contributors to theses totals include Southern Africa`s economic powerhouse South Africa, Egypt and Morocco in North Africa (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2011)

Southern Africa `s richness in cultural and natural heritage represents the basis for the development of tourism as a tool towards poverty alleviation. Africa`s natural and cultural assets are lasting comparative advantages which cannot be grown or manufactured elsewhere. The Southern Africa `s current trends reflect that the sub-region has a potential to be dominant in future, to be on top of all other sub regions in Africa including North Africa which used to lead the pack as a net recipient of international tourism traffic and expenditure. Indeed the Southern Africa region is set to upset the apple cart in terms of regional balances if the statistical data proffered by the UNWTO is anything to go by. The political theatrical skirmishes currently obtaining in the North Africa dubbed as the Arab spring could in a way result in tourism diversion from the north to the south in synch with what Lockwood and Medlik (2001) regard as perceived safety and security concerns on the part of prospective travellers. The fact that Southern Africa is far flung from the centre of political disturbances keeps it clear of any contagious effect hence in the mind of the international visitor is safer to patronise ahead of North Africa. Indeed the so-called Arab spring could help puncture the long held safe perception destination tag associated with North Africa. Traditionally, of the 30 million and plus visitors to Africa the north used to receive the bulk of the same. This is largely due to its proximity to key generating source markets. By the year 2010 Southern Africa outstripped the north by playing host to a whopping 19 million visitors as compared to 12.8 million for North Africa. One can easily discern that if such rhythm and momentum are maintained the balance is tipped in favour of Southern Africa in the foreseeable future. The forecast by the UNWTO gives credence to this observation since it projects the Southern Africa sub-region to bullet a massive 36 million against 19 million in favour of North Africa. Table 3 below seeks to show this.

Tourist Arrivals and Receipts in Africa`s five sub-regions: 2011

Findings Increase in Discretionary Income and Leisure Time

The research study established that since the attainment of political independence among Southern Africa countries, respective governments moved swiftly to embark upon economic development programs meant to uplift the livelihood of their citizens. Such economic programs have yielded positive results as evidenced by the general improvement of the living standards of people (Nicholas, 2009). People are now realising more income resulting in more discretionary income which can be expended on tourism and other recreational activities. The same can be said on time among people. Most workers are now getting more and more time off work and this coupled with discretionary income have resulted in the boosting of tourism. Added on to this is the dual family income factor whereby there are two incomes in the family resulting in more disposable income. Tourism is driven by income and time as asserted to by Boniface and Cooper, (2001). In the absence of these two ingredients there is virtually no tourism. With most Southern Africa countries having an increase in per capita income, tourism activity has dramatically increased within the region.

Table 3

Region	Total Tourist Arrivals	Regional Market Share: Arrivals	Tourism Receipts	Regional Share Receipts
Southern Africa	21748000	41.00%	21.76	54.00%
North Africa	12800000	25.00%	8.6	21.00%
East Africa	11905651	23.00%	6.33	16.00%
West Africa	4419061	9.00%	2.68	7.00%
Central Africa	1075408	2.00%	0.63	2.00%
Total	51948120	100.00%	40	100.00%

Source: The World Bank 2010

Politically Stable Environment

Tourism is a peace industry and the Southern Africa has witnessed relative political peace following the end of liberation wars in the late 1970s up to early 1980s when most of the Southern Africa member countries got independence from white minority rule. Indeed, during the war of liberation, tourism statistics were very much depressed due to safety and security concerns on the part of tourists as confirmed by Teye (1986). With the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, South Africa emerged as the region`s economic power house as evidenced by her being the major generator and recipient of tourism traffic within the Southern Africa region. The end of civil war in Angola and Mozambique has almost eradicated the negative perception held by the market that Africa is characterised by political instability. It is heartening to note that pockets of political disturbances are being tackled collectively at SADC level with exceptional dexterity by the SADC`s organ on politics and security. This has given the region some semblance of democracy. On the flip side to note are the land reform in Zimbabwe and the persistent floods in Mozambique, political disturbances on the island of Madagascar all but depressed tourism into the region, however, the fact that the Southern Africa region moved swiftly to tackle all political hot spots has given the region credit in tourism circles by managing to diffuse potential catastrophes in terms of the contagious effect within the region. To note too, is the fact that the Southern Africa region has not been contaminated with the recent and much publicised Arab spring in North Africa. The fact that the region is on the pole side of north Africa, the epicentre of Arab spring theatre, has been capitalised by Southern Africa member countries taking advantage of tourism traffic diverting from the north as demonstrated by statistics.

Open Skies Policy

The study established that aerospace liberalisation has taken place in most Southern Africa countries. Opening up the skies has seen most of the national airline carriers subjected to competition from other reputable airline carriers. This has paid huge dividends for the Southern Africa tourism industry since there has been a marked improvement in the accessibility of the region. As of yesterday, there were virtually no direct airline services with the region`s key source markets as bemoaned by Teye (1986). With the granting of approved destination status (ADS) from China, most of the Southern Africa airlines have scaled up their services direct to Beijing. South Africa Airways (SAA), has emerged as the Southern Africa`s flagship airline carrier as it is servicing almost each member country within the region with exceptional dexterity.

Globally, the open skies are known to have worked very well in other tourist destinations like The Americas and Europe where this concept originated (Paige, 2006). In Southern Africa, the opening up of the aerospace has seen airfares decreasing due to competition, improved quality of service and has provided travellers with a wide range of choice (Cooper *et al*, 2001). More importantly, load factors have increased hence Southern Africa has leapt forward in terms of tourist arrivals. South Africa has been dubbed the gateway into the southern Africa due to the sterling role played by SAA. Indeed, the country has become the hub of the entire Southern Africa in view of the concentration of airline carriers plying this country. An efficient aviation sector plays a complementary role in tourism development. Tourism literature indicates that by definition there is no tourism to talk about without an efficient airline sector (Medlik and Lockwood, 2001; Bhatia, 2001; and Cooper *et al*, 2001). However, more direct flights are still insufficient between Southern Africa and other western and American markets hence a cause for concern. Code share agreements and strategic partnership have been the hallmark within the Southern Africa airline sector much to the success of the region`s tourism industry. The region has also witnessed the entrance of new low cost airline carriers, and this has gone a long way in enhancing the region`s accessibility by the long haul tourism market.

Spirited Marketing Campaigns

The Southern Africa region has invested heavily towards the collective marketing of the region. The formation of the regional marketing body in the way of Regional Tourism Organisation for Southern Africa (RETOSA) has opened new frontiers for the region. RETOSA has maintained its presence in key source markets like the Americas, Europe and the new Asian market. It has religiously attended and exhibited at high profile international tourism platforms such as the ITB, WTM and even in Asia`s Shanghai Travel Mart as a way of widening the region`s horizon in terms of marketing. The study established that member countries contribute the financial resources towards the marketing of the region`s rich tourism resource base and to date such efforts have paid off. RETOSA lays the foundation upon which SADC member countries` national tourism boards (NTB) would later take up (Bennett, 1996). Member countries simply tap from an already conscientised market through RETOSA. To date, the regional marketing body has succeeded in setting up a permanent marketing office domiciled in South Africa, sustained production of the regional monthly tourism magazine, maintained an up to date informative website for the region, produced DVDs showcasing the region`s tourist attractions. It has also produced pamphlets, flyers, portraits and a whole lot of other marketing paraphernalia. Finally, but not least RETOSA has lobbied Southern Africa countries to ease border controls with the view of allowing free movement of tourist into and within the region and consultation are currently at an advanced stage to introduce a single visa for the region as a precursor to a tourism boon.

Formation of Regional Tourism Assets/ Peace Parks

Since the 1990s the Southern Africa region conceived and operationalised the idea of peace parks or trans-boundary conservation areas whereby they sought to dismantle the physical and national boundaries on national parks to create large swathes of nature parks to allow free movement and roaming of wildlife like elephants and buffaloes. The first trans-frontier park to be commissioned was the Great Limpopo Trans-frontier park, which is a joint venture between South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique`s Kruger national park, Gonarezhou national park and Gaza national park respectively. Such peace parks have fostered regional cohesion and political peace, and more importantly have helped the region to preserve wildlife species which are the bedrock of the tourism industry. In addition, such peace parks have created irresistibly and powerful tourism regional assets to cater for multi-destination tourist enthusiasts. To date, the Southern Africa region boasts of 5 operational trans-frontier parks that have been rolled out covering the breadth and length of the region. Kgalagardi, Great Mapungubwe, Lobombo all but have helped the Southern Africa region to be firmly on the tourism map. On the statistics front, the commissioning of these peace parks saw inbound tourism traffic trebling. Trans-frontier parks have enabled the region to pool resources together and launched joint marketing campaigns through RETOSA to the best advantage of the member countries, and have helped the region to project a favourable market image through the conservation of wildlife species.

Asian Market Factor: China`s Approved Destination Status for Southern Africa countries

Results pointed out that in the early 2000, Southern Africa countries courted and scaled up the economic relations and interaction with Asia`s emerging economic giant-China. Economic interaction between China and Southern Africa countries came on the back of a series of failures of economic programs prescribed to Southern African countries by the Bretton-woods institutions through the much discredited structural adjustment programs (SAPs). Interestingly, at the same time China emerged as a force to reckon with in the globalised economy. To this end, it came at the most opportune time that China extended an ADS to Southern Africa countries. This is a special bilateral agreement between China and other member states in which the former approves the latter to market their tourism products in China. Considering the rapid economic development currently obtaining not only in China, but also in other Asian countries, coupled with an increase in trade between Asia and Africa, the Southern Africa tourism industry is set for a tourism boon from Chinese traffic. The awarding of ADS by China to Southern Africa was a shot in the arm for the region`s tourism industry. Statistics proffered by the UNWTO project China as the leading source of outbound tourism market by the year 2020, hence this is significant to Southern African countries who were granted the coveted ADS status. The ADS has opened new market frontiers for Southern Africa countries that used to depend on the western markets. With almost every tourist destination chasing after the ADS from China, Southern Africa countries are poised for greater rewards from China and this put the region firmly on the tourism map.

Hosting of 2010 FIFA World Cup Factor and UNWTO General Assembly in 2013

The epic event ever to be held on African soil in Southern Africa was the FIFA 2010 world cup whose tourism and economic footprints are visible in Southern Africa member countries. Findings indicated that the event was for the region, the massive advertising the region got, image enhancement, economic spin-offs through job creation, infrastructural and super-structural developments, post event legacies all bear testimony to the significance of this event on the region`s tourism landscape. Tourism traffic into Southern Africa increased on the back of this event, that is, prior to the event, during and after the event. Current statistics indicate that in excess of a million soccer enthusiasts and other dignitaries thronged the Southern Africa region specifically for the world cup. About R400 billion was realised, which is quite a feat for the region whose member countries aggregate GDP is around $100 billion only. The successful hosting of this prestigious global event in itself raised a bar for the Southern Africa region in tourism circles. The Southern Africa region in the run up to the world cup also played host to the continental sport event, that is, AFCON. This continental soccer show piece was held in Zimbabwe, Angola, and South Africa thus boosting tourism traffic into the region. Such a tournament has become a rich hunting ground for sports men or players for other overseas football clubs. Other significant events hosted in the region include the ATA conference in Zimbabwe`s Victoria Falls and the crowning moment for the Southern Africa region was perhaps in the year 2013 when the envisaged UNWTO` s General Assembly was co-hosted by Zambia and Zimbabwe. All of the foregoing buttresses and reinforce the emergence of the Southern Africa region as a safe conferencing destination, and this in a way helps to bolster the region`s tourism industry well into next decade.

Future Prospects, Conclusion and Recommendations

The region is poised for above average annual growth rate. The forth coming UNWTO General Assembly and AFCON in 2013 will help to bolster the region. The statistics given by the WTO further attest to a bright future for the region. The political disturbances simmering in north Africa will further give Southern Africa a head start ahead of other sub-regions. As a conclusion, and notwithstanding the above, the region need to double efforts in solving political conflicts as noted long back by Teye (1986) that civil wars and political instability that characterise the region have helped to scare off international visitors since tourist destinations characterised by unstable political environment are deemed dangerous and are avoided by travellers. On Africa`s flip side menu, is poor access. This variable has hamstrung and curtailed tourist movement from outside the region and inside, and so pathetic are the internal airline services that urgent intervention is needed in this area through opening up the aerospace fully to other private airlines since most of the national airline carriers have proved to be inefficient and some are technical grounded. The international media houses have had an insatiable intent to report negatively on Africa. On a daily basis the region make headline news for bad things and this has weighed heavily against the region from making an impression on the global tourism arena. This is one area that policy makers need to intervene as a matter of urgency to making sure that the region get positive media coverage. The media play a critical role in influencing and shaping market perception and is therefore a powerful force to reckon with which can only be ignored at the region`s peril. Future studies may need to look at how adverse media reportage has affected tourism development in the region. However, the picture projected by the UNWTO indicates that despite all the foregoing odds the Southern Africa region has had above global average growth rate. The study recommends that in view of the fact that many of the visitors to Southern Africa spend little money a lot needs to be done so that tourists spend more for the region to benefit fully. Future studies could also look into how the region can plug out revenue leakages. A clarion call made by Sindiga (1996b) is hereby repeated that the rather poor nature of tourism in Sub-Saharan Africa might be turned around by regional cooperation to encourage the easy movement of tourists across common borders (universal-visa system) and to establish joint packages for multi-destination travellers. Another uneasy observation was that many tourism enterprises are owned and managed by western multinational companies which in turn earn handsome profits by charging management fees. Most of the revenue is thus repatriated. The leakages from gross tourism receipts include money used in tourism promotion through advertising and maintaining overseas offices and international air travel.

Relatively very little is known about domestic tourists compared with their international counter parts, despite their magnitude and economic importance. One reason for this dearth in information is that most national governments in Southern Africa did not consider domestic tourists to be as important, since they do not bring much-valued foreign exchange into the country. It is often only in times of perceived crisis, as during the Asia economic crisis of the late 1990s, that rapid declines in the number of international tourist visits prompt governments to promote their domestic tourism sector. Finally, future studies should look into the impact of the universal visa and the use of a single currency for the region and how this would affect the region`s tourism industry.

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