

Business tourism delight as Meetings Africa 2011 closes



By [Bylssa Sikiti da Silva](#)

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As the sun was about to set on day three of the 2011 edition of Meetings Africa, rays of light of optimism were already appearing in the shadow of the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg, signalling an era of success and huge improvement of what is believed to be the continent's biggest business tourism platform.

A record of 7387 meeting requests were sent, with 6176 (83.61%) already actioned halfway through day two, and over 3222 meetings confirmed, according to provisional figures released by South African Tourism, which hosted the event.

Expose local and international buyers

Meetings Africa, inaugurated on Monday, 21 February 2011, by tourism minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk, aims to expose local and international buyers to a range of products and services in Southern Africa's meeting, incentives, conference and events/exhibitions venues.

The tourism industry contributed an estimated 7.7% to SA's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010, with 7.3 million international tourists having visited the country between January and November last year. Business tourism is well-positioned to be an integral part of the tourism industry, thanks to the country's ability to attract global events of major scale, according to SA Tourism CEO Thandiwe January-Mclean.

Major innovative improvements noted at this year's event include the [Poken](#), an interactive networking device which serves as an electronic business card. Exhibitors and visitors were also delighted to see an easy-to-navigate exhibition floor. The 2011 edition also generated more local and international press coverage than last year, the organisers said.

As SA attracts a lot of attention in the world due to its ability to host major events (eg 2010 FIFA World Cup, Indian Premier League cricket, [Design Indaba](#)), thanks to its state-of-the-art facilities, vibrant culture and business ethics, some say it is time for South Africans to start believing in their country.

"South Africans are slow to believe"

"South Africans are slow to believe, but once they start to believe they become true believers," investigative journalist Debora Patta told the audience yesterday, Wednesday 23 February, at the exhibition centre. "We are a country with a strong entrepreneurial, perseverant, courageous and compassionate spirit, a country that creates extraordinary people such as Nelson Mandela.

"As a country, we need to get it right. Look at what we did during the soccer world cup. We proved that we could do it. That is why we need foreigners to come here and say this is a nice country."

Patta, an award-winning reporter, is the former e.tv news editor-in-chief, and the current Third Degree presenter. She has been hailed by many for her fearless style of reporting and tough strategy to tackle the powerful, the corrupt and the cowards. But some still love to hate her for what they call her 'bitchy', 'horrible' and 'brutal' style of journalism.

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But, undeterred by the criticism and still standing tall to give a voice to the voiceless, Patta said yesterday, "This is a country where good journalism flourishes. We have a constitution that upholds freedom of expression and, if the press doesn't get it right, it is their own fault.

"Frank conversation needs to be encouraged," she said, hailing Mandela as a true leader who loves journalists while Robert Mugabe jails them, Thabo Mbeki ignores them and Zuma kicks them here and there.

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ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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