

Connecting people and ideas to strengthen Africa's tourism market

The first leg of this year's Meetings Africa kicked off with discussions between buyers and exhibitors centred around relationships and sharing of ideas, and how these can impact tourism across the continent.



Themed **Shared economies**, Meetings Africa looks at collaborative African growth, with speakers delving into the continent's value proposition within the global economy.

South Africa National Convention Bureau's (SANCB) Chief Convention Bureau Officer, Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo, captured the theme's essence during the opening address, calling on all Africans to buy into the idea that the continent is where humanity and innovation starts. "We need to buy into it so we can sell it to the world. The world is standing at our door to buy you."

Kotze-Nhlapo reflected on how Meetings Africa had grown and matured into an event that has become one that is filled with ideas that move Africa's tourism forward, highlighting how **this year's event improved on a number of fronts, including:**

- 100% of the exhibitor stands sold – a vast improvement from 95% in 2019
- 118 square metres more floor space sold compared to last year

- 329 exhibitors
- 155 main exhibitors, three more than last year
- 321 buyers that include 205 international hosted buyers

"I am sure you will see how we grew from a very small show to where we are today. We are here to learn from each other, find new ideas and innovation to overcome challenges. When we network with each other, magic will happen and we will wow the world."

Middle East, Africa, South Asia region's first World Expo to create the future

Keynote speaker, Sumathi Ramanathan, the director of Destination Marketing for the 2020 Dubai Expo, echoed Kotze-Nhlapo's theme of building relationships and inspiring ideas when she showcased all the stunning innovations and architecture that can be expected at the 2020 Dubai Expo.

It is the first time in the World Expo's 169-year history that it will be held in the Middle East, South-Asia & Africa region. "It is very significant for the region and it allows us to tell a strong story...The ambition was to always bring great minds together and creating a better future."

All 54 African nations will be participating at the expo, and they have the opportunity to engage with the 25-million visitors from around the world that are expected to attend.

Much like Meetings Africa's shared economies, the mega-events theme ***Connecting minds, creating the future*** aims to bring people together. "We are all in the business of connecting people and bringing people together through events. The power in events is not only in filling hotel beds and conference meals. But when done properly, events have real purpose and have the potential to touch humanity and individuals."

The three sub-themes – opportunity, mobility and sustainability – explore the relationship between individuals, technology and the world, as well as the movement of people, goods and ideas.

Its economic and technological impact of the event will be felt throughout the world in years to come with numerous, sometimes seemingly outlandish, innovations being explored. For instance, the mobile phone debuted at the 1970 Osaka Expo and was considered bizarre.

This year's showcase includes Dutch building materials made out of mushrooms and even Chinese satellites that can communicate with extra-terrestrials. "I know that sounds far-fetched but I am sure in 1970 people did not think they will have a phone they can put in their pockets."

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