Business-leisure market in Africa grows

By Elzaan van Rhyn

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African conferencing facilities are becoming more than just venues for local gatherings and are now attracting major international events. The continent's breathtaking natural beauty, rapidly developing infrastructure and vibrant multi-cultural people offer an increasingly attractive destination for some of the biggest global strategic events.



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With the global economy expected to grow by just 2.7% in 2017 and the African economy by 2.9%, live events have maintained their relevance in a time of cost-cutting. This is despite the potential challenge from teleconferencing technology, which is delivering a much higher image and sound quality than ever before. While the global village is relying more and more on technology to connect people, nothing beats a live event where people can interact with each other for longer periods of time and in genuine ways.

Long-term relationships and contacts can be built without the worry of losing internet connection or electricity, and nothing could ever replace the subtle nuances of face-to-face contact that are lost even through the most advanced digital contact. Along with a vibrant grass-roots economy, the continent’s unique cultural and tourism experiences mean the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) industry in Africa is starting to boom, despite budget cuts.

In fact, while companies and government departments might cut marketing, advertising and promotion costs, budgets are being diverted to conferences and exhibitions, as the measurable return on investment is more substantial and impactful. Increasingly, conference organisers are looking for fresh locations that leave attendees inspired and energised – especially where team building, sales, strategy and creativity are critical elements to the event process.

‘Bleisure’ opportunities grow

Global conference organisers also want to host their events at the best locations, where their delegates won’t be distracted by the hustle and bustle of big city life. The growing trend towards ‘bleisure’ hospitality, where companies seek to combine ‘business’ and ‘leisure’ elements, is serving to create memorable, informative experiences in stress-free environments.

Developers are picking up on this trend and leading leisure properties are being renovated to include worldclass conference centres to cater for business and industry events, along with entertainment. In this way, visitors to African destinations are offered the benefit of sophisticated corporate facilities along with the natural beauty and excitement of the African continent.

There's no better time than now for owners of traditionally leisure-focused assets to boost their conferencing capabilities. While upgrade costs might be daunting, the long-term benefits are immeasurable. Owners benefit from referrals and marketing their properties while the surrounding economy is stimulated through job creation and new supply chains.

Botswana

The Grand Palm in Botswana and the Umodzi Park in Malawi are two exciting properties that are attracting people who might otherwise have not even visited the continent.

In 2016, The Grand Palm Resort, located in Gaborone, erected a new multi-purpose marquee to add versatility to the resort, especially for large scale events. Since then it was picked as host to the widely televised World's Strongest Man contest, performances by musician Monique Bingham and the Royal Moscow Ballet, among others.

In 2017, The Grand Palm's four-star Walmont hotel began upgrades to create a world-class aesthetic quality, including a complete revamp of its Okavango and Moremi conference rooms. With new interior design and a full refurbishment of the main conference hall and breakaway rooms, the conference centre received a modern facelift that rivals leading venues abroad. With the casino also being completely overhauled, delegates will experience the same standard of excellence across the entire resort.

Malawi

In Malawi, construction on Umodzi Park commenced in 2009 and was completed in 2012 as a mixed-use facility. It is the ideal business getaway, featuring the 130-room President Walmont Hotel, the only five-star hotel in Malawi. Adjacent to this is the Bingu Wa Mutharika International Convention Centre, which has 15 different venues and the capacity to host 1,500 people in its main auditorium.

The convention centre was picked to host events such as the 2017 Miss Malawi pageant and the successful African Land Forces Summit, which received delegates from 44 countries in May, including the US, France, UK, Brazil and leaders from across Africa.

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