

2nd UN Tourism and ICAO Ministerial Conference on Tourism and Air Transport in Africa

Luanda, Republic of Angola
22-24 July 2025

Concept note **Ministerial Conference (23-24 July 2025)**

I. Background and Context

Africa's path towards deeper regional integration and economic transformation depends on the synergy between air transport and tourism, which are essential for unlocking opportunities for trade, investment, and sustainable development.

Recognizing the critical importance of these sectors, the **2nd UN Tourism / ICAO Ministerial Conference on Tourism and Air Transport in Africa, to be held in Luanda, Angola, from 22 to 24 July 2025**, offers a strategic platform to advance the collaboration and address the challenges affecting the seamless development and growth of these two complementary sectors. Building on the achievements of the first edition of the [UN Tourism / ICAO Ministerial Conference on Tourism and Air Transport in Africa in Sal Island, Cabo Verde in 2019](#), this conference coincides with significant global milestones, such as the UN Tourism Organization's 50th anniversary and ICAO's 80th anniversary in 2024, underscoring the global commitment to advancing Africa's sustainable development and regional integration through enhanced air connectivity and tourism growth.

In 2024, global tourism is on the path to fully recovering from the pandemic, with 1.4 billion international arrivals, reflecting an 11% increase over 2023. Africa welcomed 74 million international tourists, exceeding 2019 levels by 7%¹.

Of these, a significant percentage arrived via air transport. **Globally**, air transport is the primary mode of travel for international tourists, accounting for approximately **60% of all international arrivals**. In Africa, air transport is particularly vital, with around **50% of international tourists arriving by air**, reflecting the critical dependency of the tourism sector on air connectivity.

¹ World Tourism Barometer, January 2025 <https://www.unwto.org/news/international-tourism-recovers-pre-pandemic-levels-in-2024>

In 2022, the total number of passengers on scheduled air services increased by 3.3 billion, a 42.8% increase from 2021. Africa accounted for 2.2% of global air traffic, with a significant increase of 83.3%². However, challenges such as high transport costs, economic uncertainty, and volatile oil prices persist, presenting ongoing risks to sustained growth.

This aligns with key global frameworks, including the [UN SDGs](#), the [UN Tourism Agenda for Africa – Tourism for Inclusive Growth](#), and the [African Union Agenda 2063](#), all of which highlight the critical role of air transport and tourism in driving inclusive growth and regional development. A key area of the **UN Tourism Agenda for Africa – Tourism for Inclusive Growth** is enhancing air connectivity and visa facilitation, essential to unlocking Africa's tourism potential and fostering job creation and sustainable development across the continent.

As Africa emerges as a key stakeholder in global tourism and aviation, the conference will bring together policymakers, industry leaders, and experts to explore opportunities in regulatory and policy frameworks, mobility, infrastructure, investment and innovative solutions. By leveraging technological advancements and making thoughtful policy adjustments, Africa can address current challenges and unlock new pathways for sustainable development and economic growth.

II. Benefits of Tourism and Air Transport in Africa

Tourism and air transport are foundational to Africa's economic prosperity, fostering trade, investment, and regional integration. As critical enablers of sustainable growth, these sectors have a profound impact on job creation, infrastructure development, and the broader economic landscape:

- **Connectivity:** Air transport is a critical enabler of connectivity, particularly for African Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which face geographical constraints and remoteness. These challenges make low transport connectivity a significant barrier, reducing trade and economic opportunities compared to transit countries. For these nations, air transport is often the most viable and efficient means of connecting to global and regional value chains, facilitating access to markets, and promoting socio-economic integration. Connectivity is essential for the sustainable development of the region, enabling better integration into the global economy.
- **Economic Growth:** The aviation industry plays a pivotal role in driving economic prosperity and global GDP. For many States, aviation is placed at the centre of national strategic planning and serves as an instrument of national policy due to

² ICAO <https://www.icao.int/sustainability/WorldofAirTransport/Pages/the-world-of-air-transport-in-2022.aspx>

its direct contributions to States' income and importance in supporting other economic sectors such as tourism and international trade. Although Africa accounts for 18% of the global population and possesses only 2.1% of air transport activities (combined cargo and passenger)³, Africa stands out as the region with the greatest potential and opportunity for aviation. Globally the total export revenues from tourism (including passenger transport) are estimated at a record USD 1.9 trillion in 2024, about 3% higher than before the pandemic and 4% more than in 2019 (real terms). International tourism receipts had already recovered to pre-pandemic levels in 2023. According to preliminary estimates, receipts reached USD 1.6 trillion in 2024, about 3% more than in 2023 and 4% more than in 2019 (real terms).

Tourism and Air Transport serve as catalysts for trade, foreign direct investment (FDI), and diversification of economies, advancing Africa's broader development agenda. The economic expansion generated by aviation and tourism improves living standards, alleviates poverty, and sustains prosperity.

- **Job Creation:** Pre-COVID aviation supported 7.7 million jobs and \$63 billion in economic activity in Africa⁴. Projections are for demand to triple over the next two decades, and **tourism supports one in 10 jobs** and provides livelihoods for many millions more in both developing and developed economies⁵. These sectors are vital in addressing unemployment, women empowerment and gender equality, fostering inclusive growth, and promoting sustainable livelihoods for communities.
- **Regional Integration:** Air transport shapes the economic ties between States and regions by supporting mutual interests and prosperity. The competition derived from air transport growth promotes efficiency, innovation, and liberalization, resulting in increased connectivity and enhanced benefits for consumers. Enhanced air connectivity strengthens Africa's integration into the global economy and bolsters regional trade. Initiatives such as the [African Continental Free Trade Area](#) (AfCFTA) and the [Single African Air Transport Market \(SAATM\)](#) are key to unlocking significant economic benefits. Liberalization would also be expected to stimulate trade and tourism between the countries, generating an estimated **US\$1.3 billion** in additional spending.⁶. All these aspects have forged stronger economic ties and collaboration among States and regions.

³ IATA <https://www.iata.org/en/pressroom/2023-releases/2023-04-03-01/>

⁴ IATA <https://www.iata.org/en/pressroom/2023-releases/2023-04-03-01/>

⁵ UN Tourism <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-and-covid-19-unprecedented-economic-impacts>

⁶ <https://www.iata.org/contentassets/70e363e7f97b4bbfb5daff1c27ff0e29/single-african-air-transport-market.pdf>

- **Sustainability:** Both sectors are increasingly incorporating sustainability into their operations. Eco-friendly initiatives in infrastructure development and green travel practices are essential to advancing Africa's environmental goals while ensuring long-term competitiveness in the global market.
- **Infrastructure Development:** States with well-connected airports and strong networks are more attractive to multinational corporations and see greater FDI. The construction of airports as a direct investment in the regional economy generates on-site employment with cascading impacts on local and regional economic growth. Targeted investments in air transport infrastructure, tourism facilities, and road networks are critical to enhancing regional competitiveness. These investments provide the foundation for building resilient economies, supporting sustainable tourism, and driving growth across the continent⁷.
- **Tech integration:** The integration of technology, in the aviation sector offers numerous benefits that enhance both operational efficiency and passenger experience. Technology facilitates better communication between airlines and passengers, providing real-time information on flight status and enabling more personalized customer service. Baggage management has also improved, with tracking systems reducing the incidence of lost luggage.

III. Objectives of the Ministerial Conference

The 2nd UN Tourism / ICAO Ministerial Conference on Tourism and Air Transport in Africa to be held in Luanda, Angola from 22 to 24 July 2025 seeks to provide a strategic platform for advancing innovative solutions in air transport and tourism, with a focus on policy harmonization, infrastructure development, investments, regional integration, and innovative solutions. The conference aims to:

- Foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among African governments, international organizations, and the private sector to address key challenges and capitalize on emerging opportunities in air transport and tourism;
- Promote the adoption of inclusive and effective policies among African governments that strike a balance between economic growth and other socio-economic factors, with particular attention to addressing connectivity, infrastructure gaps, and ensuring that tourism and air transport are inclusive to all, including persons with disabilities and those with limited mobility;

⁷ African Development Bank <https://www.afdb.org/en/knowledge/publications/tracking-africa%E2%80%99s-progress-in-figures/infrastructure-development>

- Encourage investments in critical infrastructure, including airports, transport networks, and tourism facilities, as well as promote accessible tourism, including for people with disabilities and limited mobility, to facilitate regional integration;
- Strengthen synergies between the air transport and tourism sectors, optimizing their combined potential to generate substantial economic and social benefits for the continent;
- Equip stakeholders with the necessary tools, insights, and best practices to implement transformative strategies that position Africa as a global leader in sustainable tourism and aviation;
- Leverage AI and innovation to create smart solutions that enhance air transport, tourism operations, and regional connectivity, driving automation, efficiency, and personalized customer experiences in both sectors.

IV. Expected Outcomes

The conference aims to produce measurable, actionable outcomes aligned with the objectives that supports the attainment of the UN SDG and the African Union Agenda 2063 including:

- **Policy Commitments:** The establishment of stronger regional and national policy frameworks that promote air transport liberalization and foster the integration of sustainable and inclusive practices across both sectors.
- **Investment Mobilization:** The facilitation of new funding commitments and investment pledges from both public and private sector stakeholders, focusing on infrastructure development and innovation in the aviation and tourism sectors.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** The forging of deeper collaboration among African governments, international organizations, the private sector, and development partners, leading to the co-creation of innovative solutions that address Africa's key challenges.
- **Capacity Building:** Strengthened institutional capacities, including the establishment of knowledge-sharing mechanisms that enable African nations to better manage sustainable tourism and aviation growth.
- **Promoting Mobility and Accessibility:** The adoption of concrete measures to improve infrastructure and services for people with disabilities and limited mobility, ensuring that both tourism and air transport become more accessible and inclusive across Africa.

- **Harnessing Innovation:** The identification and integration of cutting-edge technologies such as AI, smart mobility, and sustainable infrastructure solutions that will optimize both air transport and tourism systems.
- **Modernization of Aviation Infrastructure:** Strategic planning for the modernization of aviation infrastructure, including the development of state-of-the-art facilities and services that meet international standards. This modernization will contribute to enhanced safety, efficiency, and capacity, ensuring that Africa's aviation sector supports economic growth and connectivity in the long term.

V. Target Audience

The ministerial conference will convene high-level key stakeholders in the air transport and tourism sector, as well as related sectors, including:

- **Government Officials:** Ministers and senior representatives from tourism, air transport, and infrastructure.
- **International Organizations:** Representatives from ICAO, UN Tourism, UNECA AfDB, African Union, AFCAC, AUDA-NEPAD, Economic Regional Communities, ACI, IATA, and other key development partners.
- **Aviation and Tourism Industry Leaders:** CEOs and executives from airlines, airport authorities, hospitality groups, and travel companies.
- **Investors and Financial Institutions:** Key representatives from multilateral development banks, sovereign wealth funds, and private investors focused on air transport, tourism, infrastructure, and innovation.
- **Technology and Innovation Experts:** Specialists in AI, smart mobility, digital transformation, and innovative solutions for the aviation and tourism sectors.
- **Academia and Research Institutions:** Experts in aviation policy, economic development, and sustainability, providing valuable insights for policy and practice.

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