New research: Travel spend in Africa could increase by 27% in 2020

Research conducted by the Sabre Corporation has revealed that spend among African travellers could increase by 27% over the next year if they were able to move more freely within the continent, and if travel pain-points were addressed. More than 5,000 people across Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa were asked whether they had travelled by plane in the past 24 months, to which 26% said they had - a 2% increase on Sabre's similar 2016 study.

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However, those that did travel cited that various barriers were preventing them from travelling more often. The majority said that air travel was too expensive, but many also cited difficulties in obtaining visas and booking flights; delays, queues at the airport, and overall stressful travel experience, as some of the reasons they don't travel more.

Of those that had travelled, there was a willingness to spend up to 27% more on air travel if they could travel visa-free throughout the continent – with most respondents saying they would take two to three trips per year compared with the one to two they currently take. More than 90% were also willing to spend more on ancillary services like in-flight Wi-Fi and entertainment, and special on-board food and beverages. Forty-three percent said they would spend over $100 on these ancillaries to improve their travel experience – 26% up on 2016 and still significantly more than global averages.

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"It is encouraging to see that a greater number of people have been able to access air travel over the past three years," said Dino Gelmetti, vice president sales, Middle East and Africa. "However, our research shows that there is still a long way to go to make travel affordable and accessible. The majority of our respondents' barriers to travel are within an airline's control, and investing in the latest technology can significantly improve the whole flight experience – from booking to the day of travel."

Travel industry revenue opportunities

Those polled said that if pain points were eliminated and they could travel more freely, the countries top of their lists to visit are South Africa, Ghana, Ethiopia, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Kenya and Botswana. And, in an environment in which airlines across Africa are grappling with slow growth, this study sheds light on significant opportunities for the travel industry to improve the travel experience and capitalise on new revenue opportunities.

"Overcoming the cost constraint is a major challenge, but all indications are that if airlines were able to reduce flight costs by optimising operations, routes and pricing, far more African people would take advantage of the opportunity to travel by air," continued Gelmetti.

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"Digital technologies offer the key to slashing operational costs, improving efficiencies and understanding customer pain points. By using data harnessing technologies to make sense of customer data and using these insights to offer passengers the right product in the right context at the right time, travel operators immediately improve their chances of increasing sales."

Airlines also need to break down barriers such as confusing booking and check-in processes, by adopting multi-channel sales and check-in processes that allow travellers to engage in the channels they are most comfortable with – be those traditional channels such as travel agents and check-in staff, or digital channels such as websites and mobile apps.

These same digital channels lend themselves to streamlined ancillary services sales, allowing travellers to quickly and easily order and pay for personalised add-ons to enhance their travel experience.

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