

AU passport boost might see tourism become the bedrock of Nigerian economy

According to Kushal Dutta, the managing director of Jumia Travel Nigeria, if the African Union (AU) passport is adopted by the country's legislators, Nigeria's tourism and hospitality industry might overtake the downstream sector by 2021. He further said the Pan-African Passport will allow for free movement of domestic tourists in the country.

Dutta made the remark last weekend while fielding questions from journalists on the potential of the Nigerian tourism and hospitality industry as an alternative to boosting the country's economy. According to him, the opportunities presented by the unified African passport supersede the threats, especially now that Nigeria's mainstay which is oil might not be sufficient to grow the economy; if the country's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are to be achieved.

He also noted that the reality of the dwindling oil prices as a result of the fall in foreign exchange is now being felt across all sectors and as such, many industry experts are daily brainstorming on diversification opportunities to prevent the country from going into recession.

"In Nigeria, industry leaders have highlighted the hospitality industry among the sectors with the most opportunities for growth in the next five years. Breaking the barrier of free travel for other African countries to come to Nigeria is a potent way of enhancing the growth of the hospitality industry. Although, there is no gainsaying that the unified AU passport will also have some demerits such as unmonitored inflow of migrants and perhaps criminals from one country to another," he said.

Opportunities for the continent

Kushal also touched on the opportunities the AU passport will bring for the African continent, stating that, there will be an increase in domestic tourism in the continent and this will pave way for increase in job creation.

He cited the 2015 report on Travel and Tourism Industry in Africa which indicated that the industry generated approximately nine million jobs directly (3.0% of total employment) and a growth forecast of 0.3% in 2016 (2.9% of total employment). This includes employment by hotels, restaurants, travel agents such as Jumia Travel and airlines among others. It is predicted that by 2026, the industry will account for about 11.7 million jobs directly in Africa - an increase of 2.5% per annum over the next decade.



©Qi Feng via [123RF](#) - Nigerian artist performs folk music

It will be recalled that the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) recently rolled out a number of measures, including technical assistance, capacity building and the revision of the country's Tourism Master Plan, as part of efforts to ensure the development of tourism in Nigeria. The UN Agency made the announcement at the end of a two-day meeting between the Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed and the global tourism agency in Madrid, Spain.

In the same vein, President Muhammadu Buhari, at the 2016 National Summit on Culture and Tourism in Abuja, stated that Tourism and Culture, which had been neglected in the past, would soon be the bedrock of Nigeria's economy.

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