

Home turf advantage

The 2010 Football World Cup will usher in a new era for the African meeting industry, according to Miller Matola, chief executive officer, International Convention Center Durban

In the past, the quest to improve Africa's role and positioning as a meeting and event destination has often been a challenging process, hindered largely in some parts of the continent by lack of infrastructure, facilities and the required capabilities to attract international meetings and events on a large scale. However, with increased democratisation and stability, most destinations in the continent are increasingly realising the importance of the meeting and event industry as a catalyst and driver of economic development.

A key event that will assist in propelling the continent even further in its quest to be a player in the industry is the hosting of the FIFA 2010 Football World Cup in South Africa. Hailed as an 'all-African' world cup, the Football World Cup in South Africa will galvanise the continent into greater co-operation and co-ordination, and be a key element in advancing African destinations in the minds of meeting planners.

More importantly though is the growing investment in infrastructure and facilities across most of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, which will deliver a lasting legacy for the meetings industry. It is estimated that US\$100 billion worth of infrastructure development investment is being

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ploughed into safety and security, transportation, information management, customer service, new hotels, and meeting and event facilities.

In Durban, South Africa, a new international airport and trade port are due to open early in 2010. A new iconic stadium is also nearing completion, while several new hotels are under construction in the city and its environs. A total of 55,000 graded rooms were required by Match, a professional services company selected by FIFA to provide ticketing, accommodation and event information technology. The national tourism marketing agency, South African Tourism, believes that South Africa will have approximately 100,000 hotel rooms available before the World Cup.

However, supply factors are only one aspect of the equation. Creating demand for meetings and events is critical in ensuring a destination's success in the highly competitive meeting industry. Various marketing initiatives and institutional alignments are also being undertaken, including:

- A greater focus on the meeting market by South African Tourism (SAT) as evidenced by a better resourced and equipped business tourism unit
- Moves to finalise the establishment of a convention bureau by the City, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the ICC and regional tourism authorities in Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal
- Introduction of incentives by the Department of Trade and Industry that support investment in meetings, facilities and capabilities

These developments, along with the patriotism engendered by the hosting of the World Cup, the inevitable media publicity it will generate and the huge demand to associate corporate meetings with this event, will usher in a new chapter for the meeting and event industry in the African continent. ●



Miller Matola is a long standing member of the International Association of Congress Centres (AIPC) and chief executive officer of the International Convention Center Durban. AIPC is the pre-eminent international association of convention centres, with a mission of encouraging, supporting and recognising excellence in centre management. Its global network of over 165 leading centres in 53 countries, combined with the active involvement of more than 650 centre management professionals ensures a broad and diversified level of industry knowledge and expertise, while its wide variety of programme activities supports members in developing and enhancing their skills in the areas of operations, finance, technology, staff development, marketing, client relations and sustainability. For further information please contact marianne.de.raay@aipc.org or visit www.aipc.org