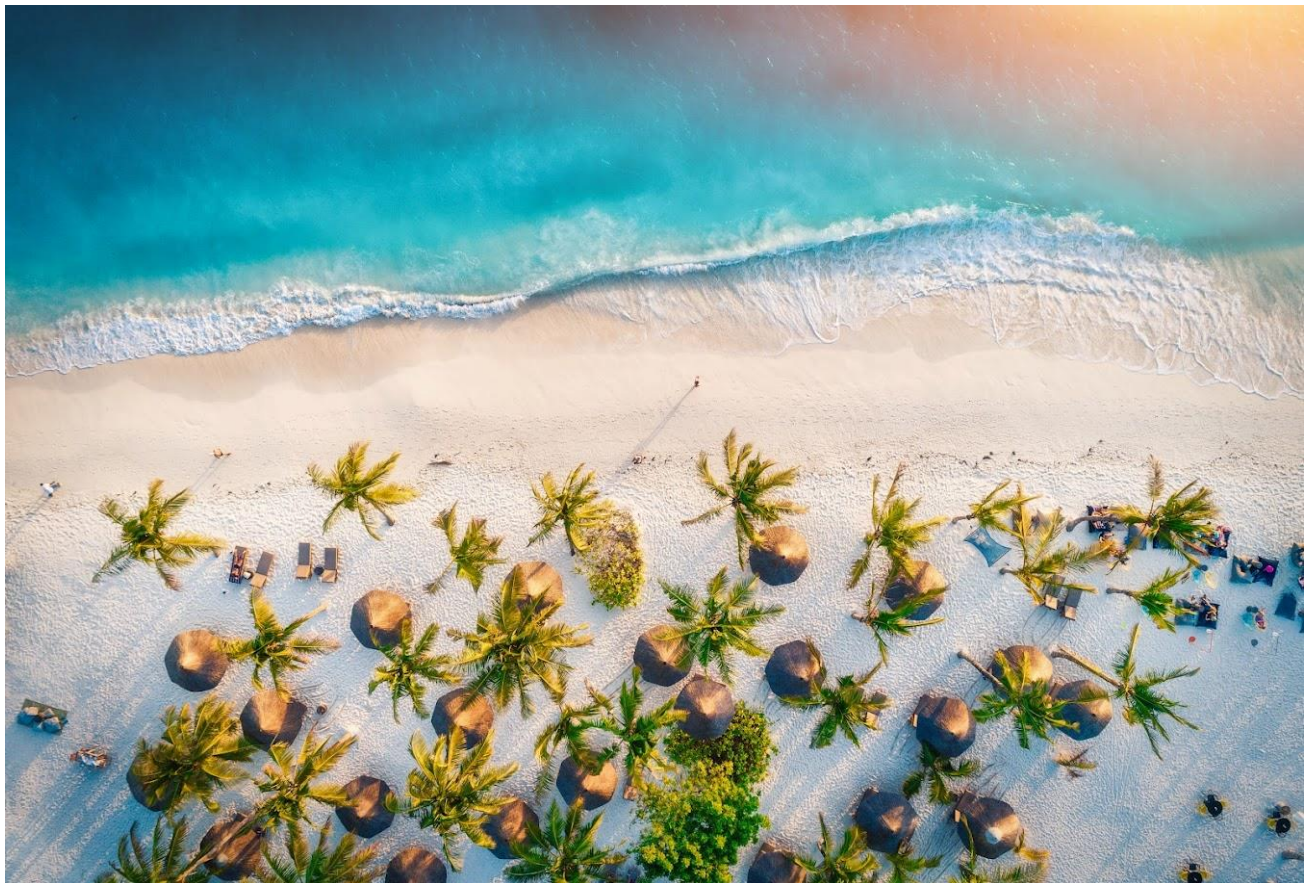


EAST AFRICA TOURISM PLATFORM

**CALL FOR LESSER TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS
AND INCREASED VACCINATION UPTAKE
AMID THE OMICRON VARIANT**

December 21, 2021





COUNTRIES SHOULD EASE TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS AMID NEW OMICRON COVID-19 VARIANT

INTRODUCTION

- Just as many countries around the world were beginning to re-open their borders and ease travel restrictions, reports came in of a newly detected Coronavirus (Covid-19) variant in South Africa.
- The new B.1.1.529 variant was named Omicron by the World Health Organization on 26 November 2021.
- Different countries and territories have taken different approaches toward preventing the spread of this new variant. However, it's sad to note that many of them are putting in place travel restrictions which could potentially hurt the recovery of the global, especially Africa's tourism industry.
- Tourism is one of the East African Community's (EAC) major economic sectors, providing valuable foreign exchange for the countries while employing millions of people and accounting for most of the region's global trade.
- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector across East African economies contributed an average of 8.1% to GDP and 17.2% to export earnings and accounted for 7.1% of jobs created. The sector provides close to 1.3 million direct and 2 million indirect jobs in the EAC partner states.
- The travel restrictions have come at a peak season for the sector and many tourism and hospitality businesses in the region had created travel packages that promote both domestic, regional and international travel for a quicker recovery. The new Omicron outbreak threatens to slow travel.

HOW THE OMICRON VARIANT IS MAKING COUNTRIES RESTRICT TRAVEL

- Many states were quick to introduce temporary restrictions on all travel from southern Africa over the new coronavirus variant. The countries concerned are Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe. Learn more about the travel restrictions by country following the Omicron variant outbreak [here](#).
- The developments have led to speculation that strict curbs on travel brought in at the start of the pandemic could be on their way back.
- Flights are being canceled across the continent while tour operators and travel agents are forced again to deal with frustrated travelers asking for a full refund of their money.
- It is worth noting that Omicron cases have been detected in the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, and Italy to mention a few, but people may still travel freely to these destinations.
- 77 countries have now reported cases of Omicron, and the reality is that Omicron is probably in most countries, even if it hasn't been detected. However, tourists from some source markets need to get into a week or more of quarantine if they travel and return from sub-Saharan African destinations.

INCREASED SENSITIZATION IN THE INDUSTRY ON THE NEED TO TAKE VACCINES DUE TO THE LOW UPTAKE IN EAC

- It was anticipated that travel in the region would start picking up in the last quarter of this year following the rollout of vaccination in the key source markets as well as in all the EAC Partner States.
- The East Africa Tourism Platform acknowledges that there is hope since the Partner States have embarked on national vaccination drives but also knows that much more work needs to be done to increase vaccination levels in the region.
- COVID-19 vaccination levels in the EAC currently stand at around 2% compared to 70% in other parts of the world.

- The East Africa Tourism Platform is urging East Africans to turn out in their numbers for the job because without vaccination, people will fear visiting the region, and critical service sectors and especially tourism will continue to suffer.
- Skepticism about vaccines in general and specifically how quickly the COVID-19 vaccines have been developed had many East Africans taking a cautious view of the jabs that could bring an end to the pandemic.
- It is NOT too late to fight COVID-19 skepticism and vaccine hesitancy. Governments and health care professionals in the EAC need to up their effort in making sure that East Africans are fully informed, engaged, and understand that the vaccines are safe.

PARTING SHOT

- While the tourism sector is still under pressure at the moment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there will be a bounce-back not too far off. Nonetheless, the ability to rebound will be enhanced through the continued collaboration and joint efforts between the EAC partner states. The EATP continues to advocate for harmonized reopening protocols in partner states to allow East Africans and international tourists to take advantage of attractions in the region and discover the hidden treasures.
- The EAC is pushing for the adoption by Partner States of the EAC Pass, an App that integrates all EAC Partner States' negative test results for COVID-19 and those already vaccinated to ensure safe and seamless travel across the region. The EATP is as well requesting the fast-tracking and implementation of the EACPass App.
- The closure of the region's key tourism source markets, cancellation of flights, tightened travel protocols and guidelines are already impacting bookings and future tourism business in East Africa.
- The East Africa Tourism Platform is therefore calling for an urgent meeting between the region's public and private sector tourism stakeholders to discuss how to mitigate the potential impact Omicron will have on the recovering tourism sector and plan the next steps for recovery.
- The platform hereby joins all Governments and private sector leaders' call to keep the highest measures of compliance in efforts to responsibly conduct business while mitigating the propagation of COVID-19.

About the EATP:

The East Africa Tourism Platform is the apex private sector body for Tourism in East Africa. The EATP Mission promotes intra and inter-regional tourism through advocacy, marketing, skills development, research, and information sharing. The East Africa Tourism Platform was established in 2011 and is supported by Trademark East Africa. The Platform, under the leadership of key tourism leaders in the region, motivates and defines private sector participation in the emerging EAC policies and behavior. It makes the private sector's voice heard and relevant in the regional integration process, pursuing common a common agenda as a sector.

Since July 2020, The Rwanda Chamber of Tourism has contributed to providing technical and operational support to the EATP, which includes hosting the EATP Secretariat. The Rwanda Chamber of Tourism is the private sector pillar of the Rwanda Private Sector Federation, which is dedicated to promoting and representing the interests of the Rwandan tourism and hospitality business community.

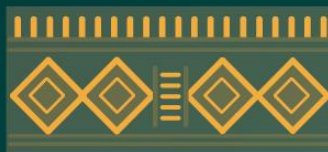
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ALL THE STAKEHOLDERS TOWARDS REBUILDING TOURISM
IN THE EAST AFRICAN REGION"

— ● —

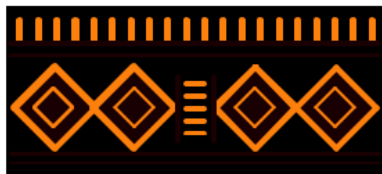
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