# THE CHALLENGES OF TOURISM GROWTH IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Tryson Yangailo<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract:

This study presents a systematic review of the literature to identify the dominant challenges to tourism growth in Eastern and Southern African countries. The aim was to provide more insight for policy makers, academics and all those responsible for tourism development. The literature review identified poor tourism marketing, poor transport and communication infrastructure, poor government support and investment in tourism, disease and lack of security as the most dominant challenges to travel and tourism growth in Eastern and Southern African countries. To overcome these challenges, governments need to adopt a multi-faceted strategy. In the context of regional integration, policy makers need to fully support the implementation of the regional strategy for sustainable tourism development by establishing an independent body to oversee and ensure the implementation of the strategy. This will lead to the establishment of regional blocs such as COMESA, SADC and EAC as a premier tourism destination, thereby promoting sustainable development, economic expansion and regional integration. Realising the full potential of tourism as a catalyst for economic prosperity and regional integration requires cooperation among states, involvement of the private sector and supportive government policies.

Keywords: Challenges, tourism, growth, systematic literature review, research gap

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 1990s saw the emergence of one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy: tourism. The global socio-cultural, economic and environmental landscape can be transformed by the tourism sector. It is one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries, with the capacity to transform the way people live in communities. Tourism is one of the most important avenues for cultural exchange, breaking down barriers between people from all over the world (Dayananda, 2014).

Over the past few decades, travel and tourism has been one of the fastest growing sectors in the world. The travel and tourism sector has tremendous growth potential and has played an important role in the development and expansion of the economies of many nations. Millions of people around the world have found work in the sector, which has also helped many rural and urban areas to flourish. A number of other industries, including hospitality, transport and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> University of Zambia. ytryson@yahoo.com

entertainment, have developed as a result of the expansion of the travel and tourism sector. The industry has made a significant contribution to the global economy and is expected to continue to grow in the future.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, it has had an impact on many national and local economies. As the economy and tourism are closely linked, any discussion of tourism is also a discussion of business. As one of the largest and fastest growing industries, tourism supports job creation, business development and economic growth - especially for women, young people and local communities. The tourism sector is quite profitable and efficient. Its share in the global GDP structure is 12% (Milova et al., 2017).

### 2. PURPOSE OF STUDY

Tourism is one of the top three export and import services sectors in COMESA and is one of the seven priority sectors under the Trade in Services Liberalisation Initiative. The theme of COMESA's current strategy is "Economic Prosperity through Regional Integration". COMESA is a significant market for both internal and external trade with its 21 member states, a population of over 640 million, a GDP of \$1.0 trillion and a global export/import trade in goods of \$383 billion (COMESA, 2024). COMESA has enormous growth potential for the travel and tourism industry. With 21 member states spread across Eastern and Southern Africa, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) offers a diverse and potentially lucrative market for tourism growth. This potential stems from the unique characteristics of the region and its status as an emerging economic power. However, realising this potential requires addressing current issues and implementing strategic development plans. It was therefore pertinent to identify the challenges for tourism growth in Eastern and Southern African countries.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Badal and Kharel (2019), no industry can transform a country more than tourism, as all other industries require large amounts of capital and highly skilled labour. The importance of tourism as one of the main service sectors in developing countries cannot be overestimated (Gauci et al., 2002). Africa now has the second largest tourism industry in the world, behind Asia-Pacific, as a result of business initiatives supported by the continent's governments (Babady Diakite et al., 2020). The pyramids, especially the Great Pyramid of Giza and the Sphinx in Egypt; the Victoria Falls in southern Africa, between Zambia and Zimbabwe; the Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya, Africa's largest game reserve; Marrakech, Morocco, at the foot of the ice-covered Atlas Mountains; the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve in South Africa; Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania; and Mount Fako in southwestern Cameroon are some of the continent's most popular tourist destinations and attractions. Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) benefited from travel and tourism in 2023, up to 6.6% from 5.9% in the previous year (please refer to Figure 1). In COMESA, the industry employed 8.1% of the labour force and generated on average 9.1% of the region's GDP in 2022.



Figure 1. Share of travel and tourism in Africa's GDP from 2019 to 2023

Source: Travel, Tourism & Hospitality (2023)

Figure 2 below shows the cumulative number of tourists arriving in COMESA member states and the percentage change for the period 1995 to 2020. It should be noted, however, that Somalia and Southern Sudan are not included as there is no data for these two countries in the World Bank statistics (see appendix for breakdown).





Source: Computation made based on data from World Bank Data Statistics

Figure 2 shows that the number of tourists in COMESA member states has been increasing year by year with the highest number recorded in 2019 and the lowest in 2020 due to the COVID 19 pandemic affecting performance.



Figure 3. International tourism pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 3 shows that even when the number of international tourist decreased in Africa due to Covid 19 pandemic that affected COMESA countries in 2020 as shown on Figure 2, Over a nine-month period (January to September 2023), 92% of pre-pandemic visitors to Africa were recovered.

# 4. STUDIES ON OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF TRAVEL AND TOURISM

This section presents the studies carried out between 2014 and 2024 that examined the opportunities and challenges of travel and tourism not limited to Eastern and Southern African countries.

The opportunities and challenges of developing community-based tourism (CBT) in Southern Tigray, Ethiopia were examined by Gebreyesus et al. (2020). The study shows that while there are significant opportunities for CBT development in the area due to equitable infrastructure availability and rich ecotourism potential, there are also significant challenges. These challenges include limited accommodation, poor tourism marketing and low community awareness. To capitalise on this untapped potential, the study advises tourism development stakeholders to work with local communities.

The trends, opportunities and challenges of the tourism industry in the Republic of Guinea were studied by Babady Diakite et al. (2020). The study concludes that the tourism industry can contribute to the country's economic growth and infrastructure development if appropriate management strategies are properly and wisely implemented. This is so that the impoverished in both rural and urban areas can break out of the cycle of poverty through economic growth and infrastructure development, which also increases government revenue through taxes.

In the context of Visit Nepal 2020, Badal and Kharel (2019) examined the opportunities and challenges facing the tourism industry. The study identified the main obstacles to the Visit Nepal 2020 campaign as inadequate tourist centres, poor quality hotels, lack of security, lack of recreational opportunities, lack of trained manpower, pollution problem, and lack of transport and communication.

Ali (2018) examined travel and tourism: potential for growth and contribution to Saudi Arabia's GDP. According to the study, tourism revenues are declining in relation to GDP. In order to increase tourism-related revenue, the government must provide first-class facilities to attract tourists from developed countries. Under Sharia and Kingdom regulations, the Saudi Arabian Tourism Authority has the authority to create new tourist destinations and allow foreign visitors to enter the country. The government must prioritise the construction of passenger rail systems and other modes of transport to link all tourist destinations and provide convenient travel.

A study on the opportunities and challenges for regional tourism development in Russia was conducted by Milova et al. (2017). The economies of Russian regions are increasingly dependent on tourism. However, not every region can guarantee long-term economic stability. According to the study, the shortcomings of the regional tourism management system are the main reasons for problems with regional tourism development.

Ana (2017) studied the European tourism sector. According to the study, travel and tourism directly contributes about 5% of the GDP of the new EU member states (Cyprus, Estonia, Malta, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia), making tourism an important economic sector. Overall, tourism accounts for around 12% of GDP in these countries. However, due to a lack of infrastructure, poor marketing tactics and low international awareness of their tourism potential, the majority of the new Member States are unable to truly compete or be compared with the old Member States.

The potential for business tourism in Mauritius, a small island developing state, was investigated by Seebaluck et al. (2015). According to the study, there are many opportunities for tourism in Mauritius. The island has many quality hotels that offer top-notch services to business travellers, as well as venues for events, conferences, meetings and incentives. But other infrastructure, such as roads, needs to be improved.

Subash (2015) examined the potential, difficulties and opportunities of India's tourism industry. According to the report, one of the main forces behind the expansion of India's service sector is the country's tourism sector. It is an industry that is growing rapidly, creating jobs, contributing significantly to the country's foreign exchange earnings and benefiting both host and local communities. However, the industry faces challenges such as poor-quality tourism infrastructure, widespread concerns about the health and safety of visitors, inconsistent passenger and road tax laws between states, and a shortage of workers with the necessary training and experience.

The tourism industry in the East African Community (EAC) has been studied by Okello and Novelli (2014). According to the study, there are a number of key issues, including country perceptions, limited tourism product offerings, inadequate infrastructure, poor marketing, low investment, political and economic mismanagement, the costs of tourism and conservation to local communities, and the vested interests of key stakeholders. The study concludes that strong governance and leadership, destination competitiveness, sustainable management of the socioeconomic impacts of tourism and conservation of protected areas in all member states are critical to the success of the EAC Economic Roadmap and Vision.

Table 1 below summarises all reviewed studies that on opportunities and challenges of travel and tourism from 2014 to 2024.

**Table 1**: Summary of Studies on Opportunities and challenges of travel and tourism growthfrom 2014 to 2024

_	1 2014 to 2024					Major Challenges	Recommendations
No	Country	Year	Continent	Include	Author		made
				Eastern			
				and			
				Southern African			
				countries			
1.	Ethiopia	2020	Africa	Yes	Gebreyesus	Limited	Tourism development
1.	Ethiopia	2020	Annea	105	et al.	Accommodation, Poor	stakeholders to work
					(2020).	Tourism Marketing	with local communities
					(2020).	and Low Community	with local communities
						Awareness.	
2.	Guinea	2020	Africa	No	Babady	Poor infrastructure in	Implement appropriate
Ζ.	Guinea	2020	Anca	INO	Diakite et		
						transportation and	management strategies.
					al. (2020).	communication, weak	
						government support in tourism, Visa	
						restrictions and tough	
						requirements for	
						foreigners, and Ebola	
						outbreak	
3.	Nepal	2019	Asia	No	Badal and	Inadequate tourist	
5.	Nopai	2017	Fisia	110	Kharel	centres, poor quality	
					(2019)	hotels, lack of security,	
					(2017)	lack of recreational	
						opportunities, lack of	
						trained manpower,	
						pollution problem, and	
						lack of transport and	
						communication	
4.	Saudi Arabia	2018	Asia	No	Ali (2018)	Few first-class	The government must
						facilities to attract	prioritise the
						tourists from	construction of
						developed countries	passenger rail systems
							and other modes of
							transport to link all
							tourist destinations and
							provide convenient
							travel
5.	New EU Members	2017	Europe	No	Ana (2017)	Lack of infrastructure,	
	(Cyprus, Estonia,					poor marketing tactics	
	Malta, Latvia,					and low international	
	Lithuania, Poland,					awareness of their	
	Slovakia, Slovenia,					tourism potential	
	Czech Republic,						

	Hungary, Bulgaria,						
	Romania and Croatia)						
6.	Russia	2017	Europe	No	Milova et	Regional tourism	
0.	reassia	2017	Lurope	110	al. (2017)	management system	
					ul. (2017)	management system	
7.	Mauritius	2015	Africa	Yes	Seebaluck	Infrastructure, such as	Island has many quality
					et al.	roads	hotels that offer top-
					(2015).		notch services
					(2015).		noten services
8.	India	2015	Asia	No	Subash	Poor quality tourism	industry that is growing
					(2015)	infrastructure,	rapidly, creating jobs,
						widespread concerns	contributing
						about the health and	significantly to the
						safety of visitors,	country's foreign
						inconsistent passenger	exchange earnings and
						and road tax laws	benefiting both host
						between states, and a	and local communities
						shortage of workers	
						with the necessary	
						training and	
						experience	
9.	East African	2014	Africa	Yes	Okello and	Limited tourism	Strong governance and
	Community (EAC)				Novelli	product offerings,	leadership, destination
	(Kenya, Uganda,				(2014)	inadequate	competitiveness,
	Tanzania,					infrastructure, poor	sustainable
	Rwanda, and Burundi)					marketing, low	management of the
						investment, political	socio-economic
						and economic	impacts of tourism and
						mismanagement, the	conservation of
						costs of tourism and	protected areas in all
						conservation to local	member states are
						communities, and the	critical
						vested interests of key	
					1	stakeholders.	1

### 5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The approach of the study was a systematic review of previous studies on the opportunities and challenges of travel and tourism growth from 2014 to 2024. According to Tranfield et al. (2003), a systematic review is a useful tool for promoting discussion and disseminating scientific findings from different researchers. According to Manatos (2017), a systematic review is an approach that locates, appraises and examines previously published contributions while remaining faithful to a specific research question. Planning, conducting, reporting and communicating the results are the steps of a review.

#### 5.1 Planning for Review

This study examines in detail the opportunities and challenges associated with the growth of travel and tourism. Many studies that have used this methodology have done so by following the action plans and strategies recommended by Tranfield et al (2003). While several previous researchers have employed the plans, reviews, reporting, and dissemination of findings outlined by Tranfield et al. (2003), their databases and research topics have differed (see, for example, Yangailo et al., 2024; Chongo et al., 2023; Yangailo & Mpundu, 2023; Yangailo & Qutieshat, 2022; Yangailo & Kaunda, 2021; Manatos, 2017; Kigozi et al., 2019; Tarí, 2011). The open, unbiased and trustworthy methods and strategies of Tranfield et al. (2003) were applied in this research.

In order to ensure a thorough and comprehensive review, a detailed search strategy was developed. "Opportunities and challenges of travel and tourism growth" and "Opportunities and challenges associated with travel and tourism growth" were the search terms entered into Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar. These search parameters were chosen to yield a large number of relevant articles. In addition, to be considered for review, an article had to be in English, peer-reviewed, published between 2014 and 2024, and address opportunities and challenges associated with the growth of travel and tourism according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles that did not meet these criteria were not considered for review.

#### **5.2** Conducting the Review

During this phase, the following standards were applied:

- I. The paper deals with the following: Opportunities and challenges of travel and tourism growth; and opportunities and challenges associated with travel and tourism growth,
- II. Peer-reviewed papers written in English only should be considered.

After receiving electronic copies of the papers, the studies that met the initial screening criteria were screened again to see if they still met the inclusion criteria. Their titles and abstracts were also reviewed and considered for inclusion.

The number of papers from the two databases was reduced to only nine (9) for the following reasons:

- I. Despite having the right title, removed for lack of emphasis on opportunities and challenges associated with travel and tourism
- II. Exclusion of title and abstract;
- III. Lack of critical analysis on opportunities and challenges associated with travel and tourism.

#### 5.3 Reporting and Dissemination

Table 1 shows that out of a total of nine studies reviewed for the period 2014-2024, only three studies included Eastern and Southern African countries (see Gebreyesus et al., 2020; Seebaluck et al., 2015; Okello & Novelli, 2014), indicating a significant gap in the literature.

#### Challenges

Based on Figure 4, the dominant challenges to travel and tourism growth are poor tourism marketing, poor transport and communication infrastructure, poor infrastructure in general,

poor government support and investment in tourism, disease, inadequate tourism facilities, lack of security and lack of trained tourism and hospitality workers. Poor tourism marketing was identified in studies conducted in Ethiopia, the East African Community (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi) and the new EU member states (Cyprus, Estonia, Malta, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia). Poor transport and communication infrastructure was identified in studies carried out in Mauritius, Nepal and Guinea. Poor infrastructure was identified in studies carried out in India, the East African Community and the new EU Member States. Poor government support and investment in tourism was identified in studies carried out in the East African Community and Guinea. Disease was identified in studies carried out in India and Guinea. Inadequate tourist facilities were found in studies conducted in Saudi Arabia and Nepal. Lack of safety was found in studies conducted in India and Nepal. A lack of trained tourism and hospitality workers was found in studies conducted in India and Nepal.



Source: Author

Figure 5 shows that the main challenge to tourism in East and Southern African countries is poor tourism marketing, according to studies conducted in Ethiopia and the East African Community, which includes Tanzania, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Burundi and Rwanda. Limited accommodation, low community awareness, poor transport and communication infrastructure, poor government support and investment in tourism, poor infrastructure, political and economic mismanagement and limited tourism product offerings are other challenges identified as affecting tourism in Eastern and Southern African countries.



Figure 5. Challenges Affecting Tourism Growth in some Eastern and Southern African Countries



Many countries in the Eastern and Southern Africa region struggle with poor road, airport and accommodation infrastructure. Inadequate infrastructure hinders tourism growth by limiting accessibility and diminishing the overall visitor experience. It is essential to improve the region's transport networks, including air and road links, to increase accessibility to tourist attractions. Tourism within the region is discouraged by cumbersome visa procedures and inconsistent visa requirements between some countries in the region. Travel within the region could be greatly facilitated by streamlining the visa application process and possibly creating a single visa system. By creating a more uniform and efficient visa application process for all Eastern and Southern African countries, tourism within the region can be significantly increased.

#### **Opportunities**

The countries of Eastern and Southern Africa offer a wide range of under-visited tourist sites to suit a variety of interests. These countries are home to an abundance of diverse natural attractions such as national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, beaches, mountains and cultural heritage sites. This diversity attracts many types of tourists who enjoy nature, adventure and cultural experiences. The region offers a special blend of natural beauty and cultural immersion, from the breathtaking wildlife safaris of Kenya and Tanzania to the rich cultural heritage of Ethiopia and the pristine beaches of Mauritius. The region is home to many different cultures, languages and traditions. Because of the diversity of cultures, there are opportunities for cultural tourism, which allows tourists to interact with local people, customs, festivals and handicrafts.

Tourism plays an important role in economic development in many ways. The foreign exchange brought in by tourists can be used to fund investment in infrastructure, health and education. It also creates jobs in a wide range of industries, including hospitality, transport and local crafts. The development of infrastructure, such as improved accommodation and transport systems, is accelerated by tourism, benefiting both local communities and visitors. Improvements in air connectivity and transport infrastructure have made it easier for travellers to access these countries. The movement of travellers within and between these countries is facilitated by improved road, rail and air links. By definition, transport is a crucial element of tourism as it connects places both domestically and abroad, and links accommodation, attractions and business services at destinations (Milova et al., 2017). On the other hand, promoting regional tourism can improve cooperation and integration between member states within the region. In addition to contributing to overall stability and peace, it can strengthen a sense of regional identity by promoting shared experiences and cultural understanding.

#### 6. **DISCUSSION**

The review shows that there is a lack of studies in the travel and tourism sector. Of the studies reviewed for the period 2014-2024, only nine studies related to the focus of this study were identified. Of the twenty-one COMESA member states, only three studies were conducted on COMESA-related countries and of the 21 countries, only 6 countries were examined in these three studies, representing 28.57%.

The review also shows that the dominant challenges to tourism growth are poor tourism marketing, poor transport and communication infrastructure, poor infrastructure in general, poor government support and investment in tourism, disease, inadequate tourism facilities, lack of security and lack of trained tourism and hospitality workers. Most of these dominant challenges affect most countries and are also experienced in East and Southern African countries, with the exception of disease, inadequate tourism facilities, lack of security and lack of trained tourism and hospitality workers, which were presented in studies outside East and Southern African countries. However, it should be noted that the lack of studies in most Eastern and Southern African countries may have contributed to this finding, as some challenges such as disease and lack of security are also prevalent in COMESA member states. For example, Ebola outbreaks have been reported in COMESA member states such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Uganda. The challenge of security has also been reported in COMESA member states such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Uganda. Security concerns in some COMESA countries, such as political instability, terrorism, crime and civil unrest, discourage travellers and reduce the attractiveness of the region as a tourist destination. Therefore, all the challenges reviewed that are not located in Eastern and Southern African countries should be taken into account by policy makers in all future decision-making processes.

The tourism industry has enormous potential, but policymakers in SADC, COMESA and EAC member states need to adopt a multi-pronged approach to realise it. This includes implementing visa reforms to speed up travel and increase regional tourism; prioritising infrastructure development projects that improve accessibility and connectivity across the region; addressing security concerns by working together and investing more in security measures; promoting sustainable tourism practices to protect the environment and ensure the long-term viability of the industry; and developing policies to ensure that the benefits of tourism are shared equitably across different regions and communities.

### 7. CONCLUSION

The tourism industry in Eastern and Southern Africa can grow and develop sustainably by addressing constraints and seizing opportunities. As a result, the region can establish itself as a top tourist destination, thereby promoting sustainable development, economic expansion and regional integration. Realising the full potential of tourism as a catalyst for economic prosperity

and regional integration requires cooperation between Member States, involvement of the private sector and supportive government policies.

In order to seize the opportunities and overcome the obstacles, regional blocs in Eastern and Southern Africa need to adopt a multi-faceted strategy. In the context of regional integration, policy makers need to fully support the implementation of the sustainable tourism development strategy. This will require the establishment of an independent body within each regional bloc to oversee and ensure the implementation of the strategy.

The study has made a significant contribution to the literature by identifying the main challenges to tourism growth. Studies in this area have only been carried out in a few Eastern and Southern African countries. It is recommended that further research be conducted in various Eastern and Southern African countries to provide additional insights into the opportunities and challenges of travel and tourism growth.

#### 8. LIMITATION OF STUDY

The research study has two acknowledged limitations. Firstly, the literature review used in this research was sourced from two databases, namely Semantic scholar and Google Scholar. The inclusion of other databases in the literature review would further enhance the study. Secondly, the review used in this research was limited to English language publications only. Future research studies should include more publications written in other languages. Therefore, it is hoped that this research will spark further debate and provide more evidence that would definitely provide more insight into the area under study and provide a more comprehensive understanding in the area under focus.

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