

# Travel

## Nigeria's tourism ecosystem is stronger than widely perceived – Asika

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**A**way from the rich crude oil resources, Nigeria has huge tourism potential to brag of.

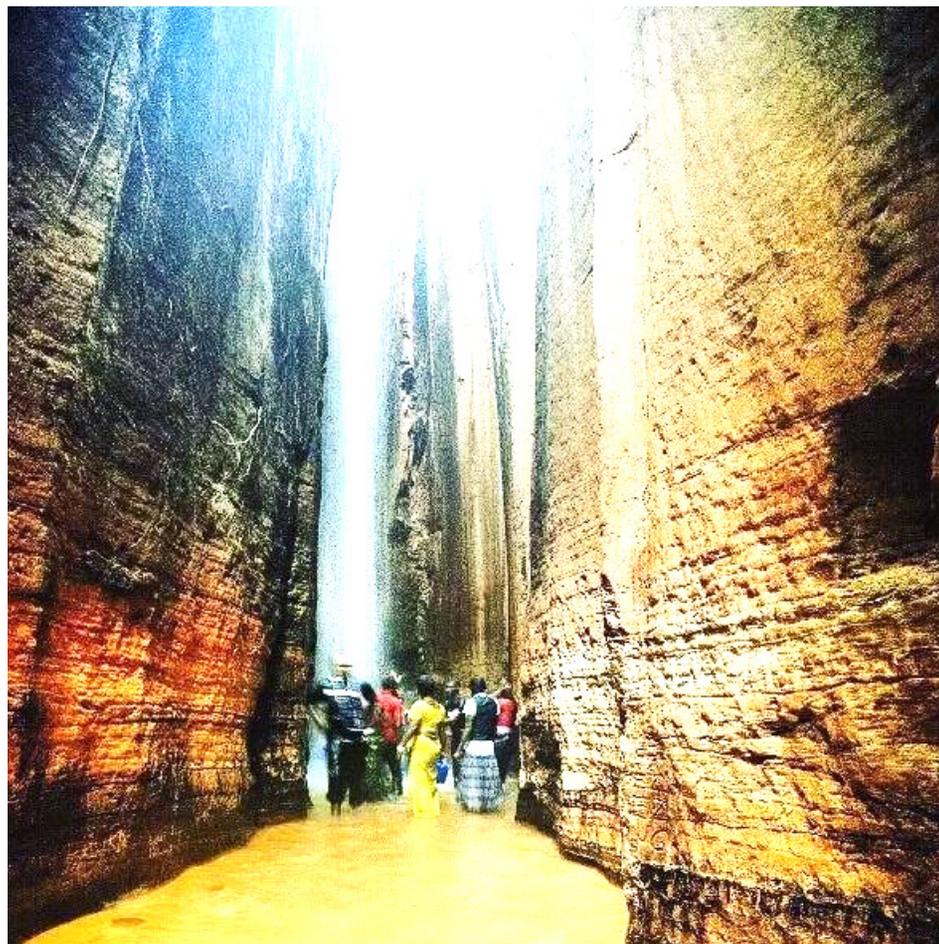
The country has over 850 colourful traditional festivals mapped out, boasts 1,400 kilometres of coastline, 12,000 hotel rooms and 37 airports and airstrips.

Despite the huge potential, the country, according to Obi Asika, director-general, National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), remains at the very beginning of unlocking a multi-billion-dollar cultural tourism economy.

Also, the director general insisted that the country's tourism ecosystem is stronger than widely perceived and far beyond the festivals, coastline and hotels.

Asika, a creative, entertainment and content expert, who spoke recently at the Naija7Wonders conference, insisted that Nigeria's creative and cultural assets could rival traditional revenue sources, especially oil, if properly packaged, digitised and monetised.

"We have indexed over 850 festivals already. If you brand them, merchandise them, build products around them, this is a multi-billion-dollar segment," he said.



He added that beyond traditional festivals, Nigeria's contemporary cultural events could push the total number of festivals above 3,000 when fully counted and structured.

According to him, Nigeria's tourism ecosystem is stronger than widely perceived. "We

have 37 airports and airstrips. We have 12,000 hotel rooms. We have 1,400 kilometres of virgin beach, less than 20 kilometres properly developed. The base assets are there," he said.

Asika also revealed that hotel occupancy in major

Nigerian cities averages between 75 and 80 percent, while an estimated 100 million Nigerians travel at least 100 kilometres annually — meeting the global definition of domestic tourism.

He announced that the Federal Executive Council has

approved a national framework known as "Niger Season," designed to calendarise cultural and tourism events across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory to position Nigeria as a 12-month destination.

The initiative, he said, seeks to integrate federal and sub-national efforts while encouraging private sector investment in festivals, heritage sites and waterfront development.

"The biggest resource Nigeria has is the Nigerian," Asika stated. "Once we back the Nigerian, we will win."

In a related development, Asika also defended pricing spikes during Nigeria's Detty December season, noting that hotel rates in global cities such as New York can rise by as much as 600 percent during peak events.

Asika, who aired these views while speaking at the Naija7Wonders conference, said that Nigerians should avoid excessive negativity about the festive season pricing.

"Anywhere in the world that becomes hot, prices go up. During the United Nations General Assembly in New York, prices can rise 600 percent. That is a global reality," he said.

He maintained that Detty December did not emerge by accident but is the result of years of investment by both private promoters and state governments. He referenced

the early "One Lagos" initiative launched in 2015 and long-standing events such as the Calabar Carnival, now over two decades old.

According to Asika, festive activity during the last Christmas season extended beyond Lagos, with significant participation in Enugu, Abuja, Owerri, Jos, Port Harcourt, Uyo and Calabar.

He cited industry data estimating Lagos nightlife alone generated \$900 million in 2024. Extrapolated across roughly 40 major cities nationwide, he suggested that nightlife could represent a \$3 billion segment of the economy.

Asika acknowledged challenges such as traffic congestion in Lagos but commended subnational governments for taking ownership of event coordination and security planning.

At the federal level, he disclosed that a Detty December Committee — comprising ministers of interior, power, security agencies including DSS and NIA, and state representatives — had been formed, though approvals came late in the 2024 cycle. He said earlier coordination is planned for future editions.

He stressed that culture remains the authentic driver of tourism. "Culture and tourism go hand in hand. When the experience is authentic, people come," he concluded.

## ATLF moves to Limpopo, as Polokwane sets to host global delegates in September

**T**he Africa Tourism Leadership Forum (ATLF) and Awards is entering another exciting chapter yet as it heads to Polokwane, the vibrant heart of the Limpopo Province of South Africa, which is a 3-hour drive or 50-minute flight from the OR Tambo Airport, Johannesburg.

The choice of the Limpopo Province, and specifically the bustling city of Polokwane, as the host city for 2026 ATLF & Awards was jointly announced recently by the organisers of the forum, including; Africa Tourism Partners (ATP), UN Tourism, BDO and all others partners.

The transition, according to them, marks a significant milestone for the forum, bringing the conversation to a region renowned for its rich cultural heritage and incredible biodi-

versity.

The organisers also noted that Polokwane, the host city, provides the perfect backdrop for essential discussions on sustainable growth, intra-Africa

travel, and tourism investment. "African tourism, hospitality, travel, aviation, academic and all other Industry professionals should start preparing travel to the City of

Polokwane, Limpopo Province, South Africa for this "one and only" Pan-African industry thought-leadership platform," they urged.

They also assured that the

ATLF 2026 would seamlessly blend high-level policy dialogue, business connections and deal-making with the authentic and soul-stirring warmth of South African hospitality

Also, given the rapid evolution of the programme of the forum, all global and Pan-African stakeholders are encouraged to monitor African Tourism Partners and ATLF social media pages for forthcoming



updates, speaker announcements, and venue highlights.

ATP, which is also the organisers of the Africa Youth in Tourism Innovation Challenge, has also assured that applications for the 2026 challenge would be opening soon. Hence, it is placing a direct call to action for anyone, especially African youth innovators in the tourism industry with a tech-driven solution, a sustainable travel startup, or a disruptive idea that can change how the world experiences the African continent.

"This year is bigger and more impactful than ever before," ATP said. "We are thrilled to introduce a comprehensive 6-week learning sprint specifically designed to equip young entrepreneurs ahead of their formal applications. This intensive incubator period will provide mentorship, business modelling workshops, and pitch-refinement sessions to ensure that every participant has the tools to succeed. Stay tuned for the official application link and prepare yourself to pitch your way to the top of the industry."

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