

# The state and potential of the aviation sector in Kenya

 By [Josephine Wawira](#)

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The aviation sector plays a critical role in the development of Kenya's economy, according to IATA, with a contribution of 5.1% to the GDP (approximately Sh330bn or \$3.2bn) in 2017 - this is beside supporting about 620,000 jobs in various related sectors including tourism.



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In a recent Hospitality Report 2018, Jumia Travel engages Kelvin Mwasi, the commercial manager of Skyward Express – one of the local airlines operating in the country – to shed some light on the state and potential of the aviation sector in Kenya.

## ***What are the main profiles of travellers flying with Skyward Express?***

Our passengers are largely domestic, aged between 18 and 65 years. In terms of regional routes, the coast attracts an average of 28% of our passengers, while the other 72% use the upcountry routes. On 12 June 2017, we recorded 40,583 total passengers, with an impressive 55% increase within the same period in 2018, reaching a total of 63,199 passengers.

### ***What would you say are the main technology factors driving Kenyans' flight culture?***

Accessibility of flight booking through the internet is a major element in my opinion. This has been a great milestone in the industry. For instance, our booking trends demonstrate that web bookings stood at 11% on 12 June 2017, direct bookings at 60%, while travel agents contributed 29% of the bookings. Comparatively, the web bookings increased to 23% in 2017, with direct bookings dropping to 47%. Travel agents now account for 30% of our bookings.

The integration of our booking engine to Mpesa now accounts for over 60% of all our revenue collection modes. This technology, which is a widely used form of payment in Kenya has made it possible for our customers to transact with Skyward Express at the comfort of their offices or living rooms in a convenient, reliable, and affordable way. We are now seeking to enhance the digital platform for our dealings with our customers by integrating our services with other service providers like hotels, car rental services and others to ensure that our customers are served better through the digital platform.

### ***How are the local aviation companies transforming domestic tourism in the country?***

Following increased publicity of the local tourist sites to the domestic market, Skyward Express has taken part in the enhancement of domestic tourism transformation by introducing flights to emerging key tourist destinations namely Mombasa, Lamu, Eldoret and Lodwar. To ensure that there is flexibility and increasing numbers of domestic tourists visiting the named destinations regularly, we have gone further to put in place daily flights to these destinations. For Mombasa, Eldoret and Lodwar, we now have an average of two flights daily with an option to increase on demand.

Our prices have been structured to make it affordable to the travellers who would like to visit these destinations. We also have plans to widen our domestic route network to cover other tourist destinations like Malindi, Ukunda and Kisumu. This will make it possible for the local traveller to transverse the nation easily and affordably. As we open up new routes in the domestic market, we see domestic tourism increasing as Kenyans find it convenient, reliable, and affordable to take weekend holidays regularly through Skyward Express.

### ***What growth potential does Kenya's aviation industry portray in 2018, especially after the introduction of the visa-on-arrival policy for Africans?***

The introduction of the visa-on-arrival policy for Africans opens the aviation industry for a business boom even further. Because of this move, there will certainly be an increase in trade activities between Kenya and Africa at large. This will stimulate cross-border travel hence increasing passengers traffic in and out of the country, and potentially making Kenya stand ahead as a preferred regional aviation and business hub for Africa. The impact of this ultimately will attract international airline investments into the local thriving carriers due to the foreseeable airline business increase in the country.

## **ABOUT JOSEPHINE WAWIRA**

Josephine Wawira is a consultant in communication and public relations with over six years of progressive writing and broadcast experience. She is currently a writer for Africa's online hotel booking portal, Jumia Travel, focusing in the areas of travel, tourism and hospitality as it relates to Africa.

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