

On any given weekday morning, the Foreshore area around the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) is a hive of activity. Business people hurriedly make their way to one of the cavernous auditoriums or meeting rooms within the CTICC.

You don't need to see the numbers to know that business is booming in the meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) space in the fairest Cape, as well as the other major centres of Johannesburg and Durban.

SA has climbed in ranking as an international conference destination to number 32 in the world, and was named the best global conference haven in Africa and the Middle East. SA Tourism's 2015/16 report indicated that the country had secured 66 international association conferences and meetings for the next five years. 'These are events already contracted for South Africa and are guaranteed business for the country's tourism and hospitality industry,' says Mmatšatši Ramawela, CEO of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa.

These events will contribute about R1.4 billion to the economy, attract 108 134 association professionals and generate 311 event days, which will benefit all suppliers in the business-events value chain. In anyone's book, these are not small numbers. In addition, SA has 45 event bids pending – again, planned to take place in the years to 2022. These events can potentially contribute R1.5 billion to SA's economy.

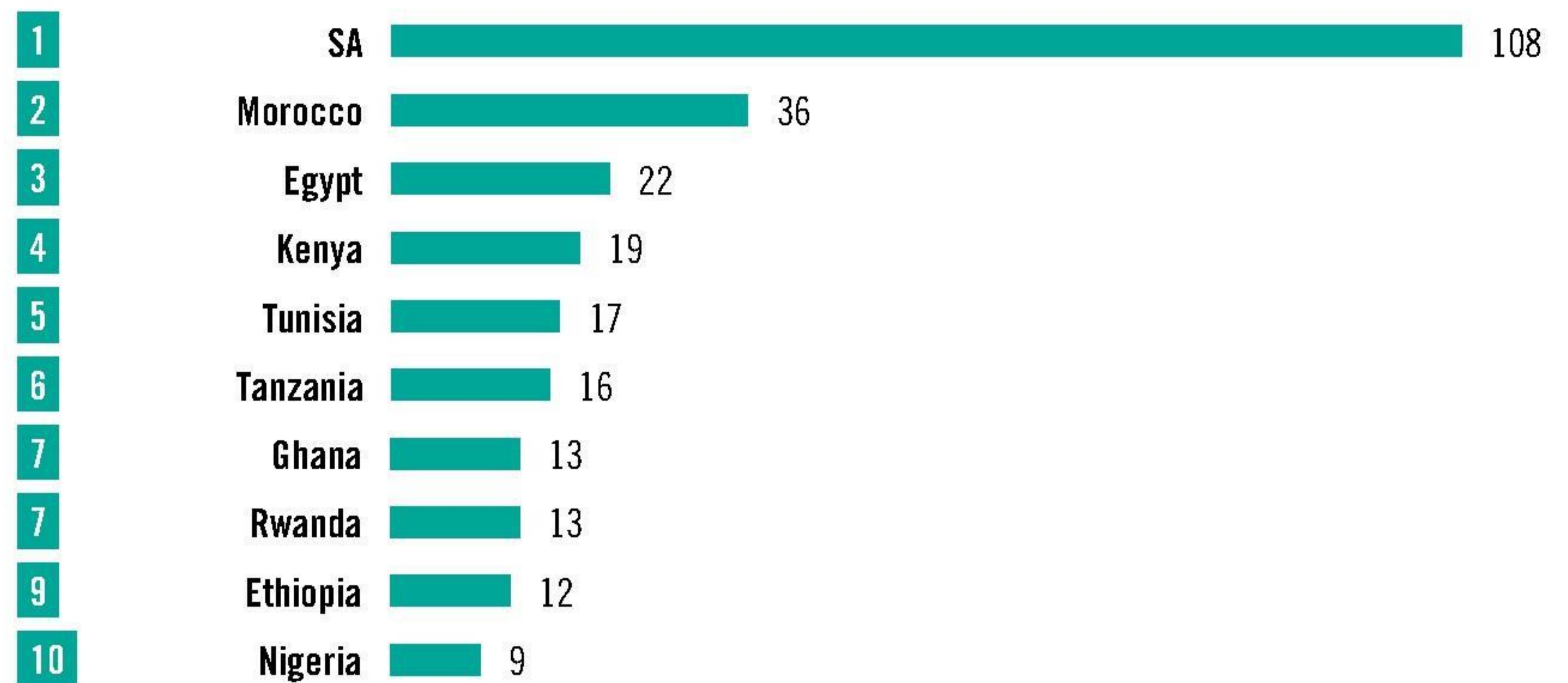
The knock-on effect of this is huge, which is why tourism industry players are rubbing their hands together gleefully. Business travellers reportedly spend on average three times more than leisure travellers, and up to 40% of business travellers return to a destination. 'Business tourists use their business trips to get a feel for the destination. If they have a positive experience, they tend to return to the destination as leisure tourists,' says Ramawela.

Pundits use the term 'bleisure', which refers to the blurring of lines between leisure and business travel. Booking.com's predictions for 2017 show a further upswing in this trend, highlighting that consumers are attaching more value to workplace travel opportunities than ever before. Events and conferences have a direct economic impact on their host cities, including job creation and money spent, as well as influencing travellers' perceptions of a city.

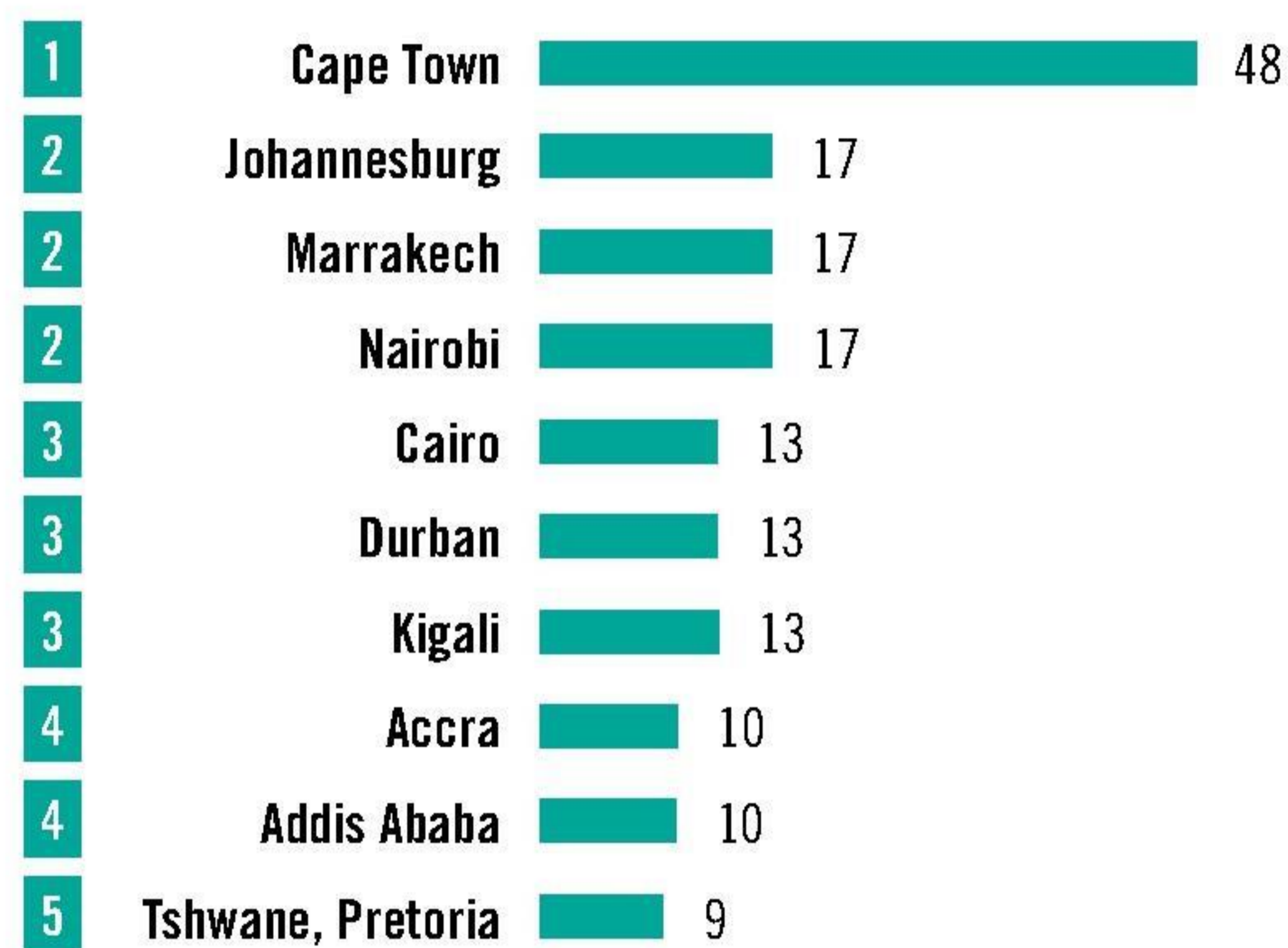
Research shows that delegates generally spend nine days in SA, of which – on average – five are at the event. Roughly 32% of delegates travelled in SA prior to the event and 34% said they travelled in SA after. This has a direct and indirect contribution to the tourism value chain, which includes accommodation, restaurants, tourist attractions and transport.

IN SESSION

AFRICAN COUNTRY RANKING PER NUMBER OF MEETINGS HELD (2015)



AFRICAN CITY RANKING PER NUMBER OF MEETINGS HELD (2015)



Source: International Congress and Convention Association

However, what about the individual centres? How are they measuring up? There are three main host cities in SA. Cape Town hosts about 47% of the international conferences, Gauteng around 19% and Durban 15%, according to the SA National Convention Bureau (SANCB).

The jewel in SA's events space is undoubtedly Cape Town – and its gem, the CTICC. Over the past several years, the CTICC has hosted an average of more than 500 events per year. During the 2015/16 period, it saw an increase in the number of international conferences and trade fairs hosted. This rise is attributed to growth in the small (less than 500 delegates) and medium (between 500 and 1 000 delegates) conference bands with almost 45 000 delegates attending global conferences.

'Cape Town as a destination is without doubt a major draw card,' says Julie-May Ellingson, CEO of the CTICC. The city's reputation as a global tourism and business events destination is growing steadily – and Cape Town constantly features on 'top cities

to visit' lists. Ellingson says that globally, Africa is the meetings destination to watch. 'A number of new centres have opened that are also driving more conferences to the continent.' The CTICC has also embarked on an expansion project, set to open in July 2017. The new facility – CTICC East – is expected to boost the number and scale of the events it can host, effectively doubling the conference and exhibition capacity.

There is no one specific sector with a majority over the other, says Ellingson. The City of Cape Town and the Western Cape government have placed priority on strengthening Cape Town and the Western Cape's competitiveness and potential through the promotion of nine key sectors for trade, investment and growth. The CTICC has aligned its own marketing strategies within this context, to secure conferences and exhibitions in these key economic sectors.

Not to be outdone, Johannesburg is also receiving top billing in the business events stakes. SA Tourism reported in May 2015 that Johannesburg