

## TOUR OPERATORS

# Trafalgar's Africa expansion highlights increased interest in continent

By Michelle Baran [Twitter](#) [Email](#) | Jun 18, 2018



Trafalgar this month made its **first major Africa play** with the rollout of a comprehensive program on the continent for 2019, a move that coincides with a what tour operators say is an overall surge in African travel interest.

"There is definitely a resurgence in Africa travel," said Stacy Fiorentinos, president and owner of Classic Escapes, a family-owned boutique tour operator. While Africa has always been a popular market for the company, "it is perceived as a safer destination nowadays, to such an extent that many accommodations on the continent are being booked to capacity."

She added that a lot more solo travelers and families are looking at Africa as an option.

Vanessa Parrish, channel marketing manager for the Globus family of brands, said Globus has also seen "a boom in both interest and sales to Africa," with 2018 bookings to the continent up 29% over the past year across all its brands. South Africa leads both in volume and in the most growth.

"This exotic destination is becoming more attainable for travelers with its competitive price points," said Parrish. She added that with the increased traveler volume to Africa overall, airfares are also becoming more competitive, averaging around \$1,300 per person.

Other operators are also reporting double-digit growth in Africa bookings: Intrepid Travel said Africa bookings are up 13% over the past year, and on the luxury end, Abercrombie & Kent said every African country it sells is showing double-digit increases for the second consecutive year. A&K bookings for 2019 are already well ahead of this time last year.

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"Americans have gotten beyond the idea of Africa as a once-in-a-lifetime destination," said Suzanne Teng, A&K's product manager for Africa. She said travelers are looking for more engaging, unique and ecofriendly safari experiences. And more clients are combining eastern and southern Africa into one itinerary, something facilitated by more convenient flights connecting the two regions.

In the midst of this Africa boom, Trafalgar is finally getting in on the action, which is not surprising given that the Tollman family, owners of Trafalgar parent company the Travel Corporation, has its roots in South Africa.

"I jump on many [Trafalgar] trips a year," said Trafalgar CEO Gavin Tollman, who said that when guests hear his South African accent, they often ask, "How come [Trafalgar doesn't] go to South Africa and we can't travel there with you?"

Tollman said that despite the demand from Trafalgar guests for Africa, the company needed to find the right partner on the ground to properly execute the program. That opportunity arose in March once the Travel Corporation completed the purchase of Cullinan Holidays Tourism & Leisure, a South African company that owns inbound and outbound operators and travel agencies. One of those inbound operators, Thompsons Africa, will run the ground operations for Trafalgar's sub-Saharan Africa tours.

### **Back to sub-Saharan Africa**

Starting in December, Trafalgar will operate its first trips to the sub-Saharan countries of Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Kenya and Tanzania and mark its return to South Africa, which the company last offered in 2001. The destinations add to an Africa portfolio that includes Egypt and Morocco.

The sub-Saharan trips will be more intimate than typical Trafalgar tours, at about 12 to 15 passengers per trip, compared with the average of 40 to 45 guests on Trafalgar's Europe itineraries.

The launch comprises 10 itineraries in three trip styles: country explorer (a trip to a single country), regional explorer (a trip to multiple countries) and ministay (a slightly condensed trip). The program's first two departures, African Safari Adventure and Essence of South Africa, are set for December. The remaining itineraries will launch during the first few months of 2019.

Itineraries range from a four-day Victoria Falls Experience trip priced from \$3,150 per person, based on double occupancy, to a 14-day African Safari Adventure, which includes Kenya and Tanzania and is priced at \$8,350 per person.

The program is not targeted to any one specific demographic.

"Africa is one of the most in-demand, bucket-list destinations," Tollman said. "People always talk about the desire to go there. Once you go to Africa it changes you forever."