

Tourism up by 3.6 percent

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"South Africa outperformed most international markets in 2009 and recorded growth in foreign arrivals of 3.6 percent," he said in Johannesburg.

The country recorded more than 9.9 million foreign arrivals last year, compared to around 9.6 million in 2008.

"This defies the decline of four percent that the global travel industry experienced last year as traveller markets reeled from the effects of the global financial crisis," said Van Schalkwyk.

"I believe it strongly reaffirms the vitality of our tourism industry."

Van Schalkwyk said arrivals to South Africa were driven by healthy increases in arrivals from central and South America (up by 3.5 percent), Asia (up 3.7 percent), Africa air markets (up 3.3 percent) and Africa land markets (up 5.7 percent).

The markets that declined included Europe (down 4.1 percent) and North America (down 8.6 percent).

Van Schalkwyk said Europe showed a decline of 15.5 percent year on year in March 2009, but improved later in the year. Similarly North America showed a 13.6 percent decline in March, but the year ended with better statistics.

"This is good news for us against the background of a serious four percent downturn globally," said Van Schalkwyk.

"That growth under these circumstances is exceptional."

He said the global downturn in travel was affected by the recession, the high oil price and the H1N1 virus.

South Africa showed a growth in foreign arrivals of 5.6 percent in 2008.

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