

A shift in tourism research

The Department of Tourism recently hosted its annual Research Seminar, an interactive platform for tertiary institutions to share tourism research finds and obtain constructive feedback from industry stakeholders and other academics, under the theme *Advancing Tourism Growth and Development through Research*.



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Over the years, research in hospitality and tourism has provided insights into areas, such as management, human behaviour, finance, planning, and marketing. Initially, tourism research focused on economic benefits. However, due to the growing importance of this industry in both developed and emerging economies, the shift of tourism research has been seen, currently focusing on the nature of the tourist, tourist experiences, socio-cultural, environmental and economic impacts, training and education needs, and the demand and the supply sides of tourism.

The Department of Tourism identified research as a critical area for the development and growth of the tourism sector in its 2011 National Tourism Sector Strategy. The strategy highlighted among other, the lack of research capacity to conduct high-quality research that meets the needs of the various stakeholders in the tourism sector.

More emphasis on policy-relevant research

In his opening remarks, Minister of Tourism Derek Hanekom highlighted the importance of putting more emphasis on policy-relevant research and its value to the tourism sector. “As the tourism department, we attach great value to research so that our decisions are evidence based, therefore, the role of researchers must never be undermined. We need research to guide us on the gaps that exist in our offerings to tell us, for example, on what components of our visitor’s experience we need to be improved,” said Hanekom.

He encouraged researchers to prioritise the public understanding of tourism. “All of us here are in the tourism field and, therefore, we are tourism ambassadors. We need to play a role in educating the public about the industry and how they

can contribute or even benefit from it. We need you to assist us in presenting a case for tourism. We also need to know what opportunities are created by the tourism growth and how that contributes to transformation of our country,” concluded Hanekom.

Fiveve research studies were presented during the seminar:

- *The potential of creative industry for destination development in South Africa* - University of Pretoria
- *Destination development through understanding tourists’ expectations and memorable tourist experiences at major tourist attractions* - University of Pretoria
- *Interventions and incentives needed to improve the number of enterprises, including state-owned tourism attractions that embrace responsible tourism management practices* - University of Venda
- *Tourism value chain and opportunities for transformation in South Africa* - University of Johannesburg
- *Development of a framework to assess the economic impact of coastal and marine tourism in South Africa* - Cape Peninsula University of Technology

The Department views these research studies as crucial as they will inform future planning, policy and decision-making. Moreover, these studies are aligned to the proposed five strategic pillars of the revised National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS), which aims to advance inclusive tourism economic growth and job creation. For instance, both the destination development studies by the University of Pretoria support the NTSS pillars of Destination Management Practices and the Visitor Experience; and the University of Johannesburg study is aligned to the Broad-based Benefits strategic objective of this revised strategy.

All the research papers will be available on the [Department of Tourism](https://www.bizcommunity.com) website from mid-April 2017.

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