

Cheapflights Compass Report 2017 reveals top South African travel trends

After crunching nearly 600,000 hours of search data accumulated by South Africans between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017, across the Cheapflights desktop and mobile websites, and its apps, Cheapflights has published its first analysis of the inbound and outbound travel trends for South Africa. The [Cheapflights Compass Report 2017](#) aims to help travellers make good choices in their future travel plans and help industry players build profitable strategies.



South Africans want to travel

The Rand may have taken a couple of hard knocks in recent months, and the world may feel like an uncertain place at the moment, but that hasn't affected South Africans' wanderlust. Quite the opposite, in fact. "Our data indicates that more than 86,000 times in the last 12 month, our South African users went on from our platforms to make a flight or travel booking, a 51% increase from the corresponding period the previous year," reveals Andrew Shelton, managing director of Cheapflights. During this period some 592,292 hours were spent by South Africans searching for flights on the .co.za site and apps, the equivalent of an astonishing 68 years.

Unsurprisingly, the most desirable travel times for South Africans correspond directly with holidays on the school calendar. December, June, July, and March account for 49% of all departure month searches, all of which are periods where there is a significant break in the school curriculum. These times of the year are also the most expensive to travel. January, July, and December are the most popular and the most expensive periods to travel from South Africa, with the average international airfare edging close to R10,000 in January.

UK remains the principal destination

The United Kingdom has long since been a favourite travel destination of South Africans and this shows no signs of waning. At a steady 29%, the UK is the most searched for destination by South Africans – more than double that of its closest competitor, the United States at 14%. Other popular destinations include Thailand, France, and Italy.

When to fly

The cheapest month to fly from South Africa is May at an average fair of R7,414. Following this is November (R7,659), with October in third place, when travellers can expect to pay an average fair of R7,732 for international travel.

Travellers can also save money by planning ahead by booking plane tickets three to six months in advance flyers can save 14% in airfare, compared to 9% when making reservations between one and three months in advance.

“Travellers can save if they’re prepared to fly in the middle of the week on Wednesdays. Mondays are the second cheapest day to fly and Tuesdays the third,” says Shelton.

Where to fly to

When it comes to international destinations Dubai is the cheapest for South Africans to travel to at less than ZAR 6,000 per flight (leaving from OR Tambo). The second most affordable destination is Italy (ZAR 6,891), followed by the Netherlands (ZAR 7,652).

During peak holiday periods – specifically June, July, and December – the Netherlands falls away and makes room instead for Thailand (R 7,851) and Hong Kong (R8,009). Even during peak season, the United Arab Emirates remains affordable for South Africans at R6,608. Flights to all other destinations during this period are north of R8,000, with the USA, Canada, and Australia topping the most expensive list.

SA loves the UK and the UK loves SA

While the most searched for destination by South Africans is the UK, the converse is also true: 65% of searches to South Africa originate in the UK. The USA and Germany are adrift as contenders in second and third place, at 11% and 10% respectively.

Searches from the UK are so prevalent that they account for almost double the number of searches originating from the other six countries, combined. The Australia-Pacific region accounts for less than 15% of all flight searches, with the breakdown as Australia 7%, Hong Kong 3%, China 3%, and Japan 1%.

Johannesburg vs Cape Town

Cape Town may be renowned for its natural splendour, but it seems like the more bustling Joburg is the city of choice for foreigners travelling to the country. Significantly, more than half (62%) of inbound searches favour flights to Johannesburg over Cape Town - though it is worth noting that this number is heavily skewed by search data from the UK, from which there are more direct flights to Johannesburg than to Cape Town.

At 83% and 80% respectively, travellers from China and Hong Kong strongly favour flying to Jozi, rather than the Mother City. With China’s growing interest in the investment and economic growth possibilities in Africa, the preference for Joburg may well be business related.

Germans, on the other hand, are twice as likely to choose Cape Town over Johannesburg, which also suggests travel for

pleasure rather than business.

“The most popular time for travelling to South Africa – December – suggests that the bulk of visitors are here on holiday. Nineteen percent of travellers want to visit the country in December, right in the middle of the South African summer with Christmas and New Year falling over this period,” shares Shelton. March and September are favourable times to visit too, with 11% of searches for March and 10% for September. The preference for March is likely related to the Easter holiday, while September is the beginning of spring in South Africa, which typically brings more moderate weather.

The enduring attraction of South Africa

“Despite the economic uncertainty South Africa is currently experiencing, South Africans are still travelling abroad, possibly saving up to do so instead of travelling more frequently within the country”, believes Shelton, “and clearly international tourists still view South Africa as a prime destination – both for work and play”.

“The data also shows the enduring attraction of South Africa, especially in lucrative markets like the UK and US. The country is still seen as a safe, good value destination that almost guarantees good weather, great food, and a warm welcome to the sensible traveller, which is positive news for the travel industry here as global competition for tourism spend increases. We look forward to working with them on exploring how our products and brand profile in those markets can help them to maximise this opportunity,” he ends.

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