

The importance of environmental sustainability in tourism and hospitality

By [Brett Hendricks](#)

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With sustainability being one of the most critical issues facing our world today, a green revolution within the tourism and hospitality industry is vital to ensuring the growth of these sectors into the future.



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It's really quite simple: a tourism product with an environmental conscience just makes good business sense.

Extrapolate this idea further: a country that has a tourism and hospitality sector that both cares about the sustainability of the environment and honours its places of natural beauty and wonder is going to lead the pack to attract international and local visitors alike to its destinations.

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Consider the example of Rwanda – a country once plagued by the ravages of its past. Within the African continent, Rwanda's overall strategy to focus on responsible high-end ecotourism rather than mass tourism has helped the country enormously to conquer the negative perceptions of that country leftover from its thankfully long-gone history of genocide.

Flowing out of the early work done by the conservation efforts of Dian Fossey as far back as the 1960s, Rwanda today has the commitment its government made to the protection of its gorillas - and the growth of its Gorilla Tourism product that grew out of that commitment - to thank. Since 2010, Rwanda has been considered to be one of the safest destinations in East Africa, with tourists now coming for much more than just the country's gorillas and its wide range of well-marketed wildlife and biodiversity options, but also the options it offers to the business tourism MICE industry.

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Numerous studies, such as those conducted by global research operations Nielsen and Cornell University's Centre for Hospitality Research, regularly demonstrate numbers that support this. It has been estimated that 75% of Gen Z and Millennial travellers would be willing to pay extra for sustainable tourism and hospitality products, including accommodation – up from 66% back in 2015. Even Baby Boomers, the ultimate consumer generation, are demonstrating that more than 50% of them would also pay more for environmentally responsible destinations.



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The studies are also revealing that economically, for operations within the hospitality sector, the cost of going green is no longer more expensive than the way these operations were run in the past. This is thanks to advances in technology related to renewable resources of energy. And of course public awareness and education of globally-savvy guests, who are becoming far more conscious, and indeed demanding, about a destination's waste management and social responsibility objectives.

Sustainable tourism must, therefore, be at the heart of all hospitality and accommodation options within our own country, and for all businesses involved in the industry. From our own operations as Thebe Tourism, for example, from Cape Point in the Western Cape to those soon to be launched within the Kruger National Park, environmental sustainability is the reason we develop where we do.

The Kruger Station food and entertainment precinct, which will also be home to the Kruger Shalati Train on a Bridge accommodation, will deploy international best practice to ensure that the venue enhances the park, adding to its overall visitor appeal but with zero impact on the park's environment, while at the same time bringing much-needed job creation and entrepreneurial opportunities to the communities around it.



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The same ethos lies behind our Chiefs Tented Camps experience, wherever these are temporarily set up in remote locations across South Africa and into Namibia. The criteria behind them are that the camps, and their occupants – to coin a phrase - touch the earth as lightly as possible, leaving behind no more than footprints.

For every single business involved in tourism and hospitality, in whatever endeavour they deliver, environmental sustainability is no longer just a catchphrase to ensure one destination triumphs over another from a marketing point of view; it's a responsibility we need to carry collectively to ensure the industry and the destinations we promote survive in the first place.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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