

Stakeholders optimistic for growth of tourism in SA

South Africa's tourism economy could see an acceleration in its recovery as stakeholders dig deep to open borders, remove barriers to entry, and create enticing offerings to attract both domestic and international visitors.



Source: Supplied | Tim Cordon, senior area vice president, Middle East and Africa at Radisson Hotel Group

A call has been made by the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA) to the government to scrap PCR testing requirements, allow meetings, conferences, and exhibitions venues to operate at a higher capacity, and spectators allowed into stadiums to support tourism recovery. And tourism players in the transport, accommodation, and other sectors are paving the way.

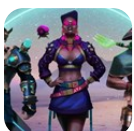
"Recent announcements by airlines such as United Airlines, Virgin Atlantic, and Emirates, that they are resuming or are committed to resuming flight services to major South African cities, or are entering into MoUs, show that they are working hard towards the process of recovery," says Tim Cordon, senior area vice president, Middle East and Africa at Radisson Hotel Group.

Looking at the numbers

Looking at tourism figures, the accommodation sector saw an 88% increase in income in March this year compared to March last year, according to the latest data from Statistics South Africa. "This indicates that inbound travellers are zoning in on South Africa again as a potential destination of choice. And if we succeed in dissolving the major restrictions for international travellers, these searches could turn into bookings," Cordon adds.

Innovative initiatives

And it seems like players from every corner of the tourism economy are coming up with - and actioning - promising campaigns and enticing experiences to lubricate the flow of international tourists back into South Africa.



Cape Town Tourism utilises gamification in new international campaign

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Cape Town Tourism and the City of Cape Town, for example, have partnered with Germany's Visit Berlin for a "Find Your Freedom" campaign to facilitate travel between the cities. South African Tourism launched its first global campaign in five years, themed Live Again, which entices travellers to come to South Africa and experience a reawakening from the confinement and stress of the lockdowns.

Tourism players in Stellenbosch in the Western Cape are collaborating to offer guests a 20% discount at various restaurants, entertainment facilities, and wine estates if they stay for two or more days. Even sports tourism is rewing up its sector's revival with engagements with Formula 1's Stefano Domenicali to bring the F1 Grand Prix to Gauteng's Kyalami Circuit as early as 2023.

Investing for growth

After two long years of difficulty, the tourism sector is also starting to invest again, with refurbishments and new openings on the cards. Tourism Minister Lindiwe Sisulu has also recently noted the government's plans to increase the number of investment conferences in the country- all pointing to a renewed sense of optimism.

"South Africa remains a key African market for us, and we are optimistic about its recovery. To underline this, the group has just opened the Radisson Blu Hotel, Durban Umhlanga, and two more South African hotels under development," says Cordon.

"We are also excited that three of South Africa's major tourist attractions are in the running to be named Africa's Leading Tourist Attraction 2022," he says.

"Robben Island, Table Mountain, and the V&A Waterfront are already high on international visitors' travel lists. With the added accolade of this award, their desirability as tourism destinations will be amplified."

Could we see a bumper year ahead?

The winter season in South Africa is generally the quiet tourism season, with local travellers heading out to warmer climates across the sea, as opposed to international travellers heading in. "So if these are the numbers and initiatives we're looking at in our 'low season', the South African summer high season looks primed to deliver a bumper tourism jump and as a hospitality group, we cannot wait to welcome guests back in droves," concludes Cordon.