

Is SA being priced out of the tourist market?

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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In the past, one of the big selling points about South Africa was that it was an inexpensive destination for foreign tourists. But nowadays, even with the rand having weakened like an overweight paunch-drunk boxer to worse than R9 to the US dollar, the country is getting a reputation for being a very expensive place to visit.

It's all about price

The blame for this does not lie entirely with local businesses jacking up their prices but also with airlines and overseas travel agents.

On a visit to the USA last month I spoke to a lot of seasoned tourists, all of whom really wanted to visit South Africa. They'd heard so much about it - thanks largely to Nelson Mandela and the 2010 World Cup - and frankly weren't fazed about the crime and violence, pointing out that certain parts of their own countries experienced pretty much the same thing.

But, they all told me that coming to South Africa was a very expensive exercise.

Why so high?

For a start, airfares from the USA and Europe, for example, are almost twice the price of air fares from South Africa to those destinations.

Secondly, when I was told what travel agents had quoted would be visitors to South Africa I noticed that in almost every case they had been quoted for five star hotels and only the top game lodges as though these were the only options.

No-one I spoke to had been advised of the fact that we have a remarkable network of excellent B&B's and that the Kruger National Park's own accommodation is an attractive alternative to the upmarket game lodges that lie on its fringes.

So, what can be done? Well, first of all, I believe that South Africa's five star hotels are among the most expensive in the world for what one is getting. For example, I visited the Biltmore Hotel in Miami - an iconic five star hotel and was amazed to find that its average room rates were lower than those of many of our so-called five star establishments in US dollar terms.

Education

It seems to be that those who market South Africa need to educate travel agents about offering alternatives to five-star

packages.

I also believe that South Africa should consider doing what the city of Las Vegas does in terms of subsidising air travel. Las Vegas is one of the cheapest destinations in the USA. Whether this is financially feasible or not, I have no idea, but certainly our country's marketers need to look at some way of enticing foreign airlines to drop their fares for visitors to South Africa. There has got to be some sort of negotiable trade-off.

There is no doubt that South Africans could entice millions more visitors to its shores if it started thinking out of the box in terms of marketing this country and focussing on the real reasons why so many foreigners want to come and visit but end up going somewhere else.

It's no good, in my opinion, just punting South Africa by shopping, through advertising and promotion, what a wonderful place this is, but in addition, removing what appears to be a lot of expensive stumbling blocks.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdyk@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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