

Cape Town Tourism identifies 10 top trends in destination marketing

"Visual storytelling, engagement and inspiration are among the factors that are set to dominate cutting-edge destination marketing in 2015," said Cape Town Tourism's Executive Marketing Manager, Velma Corcoran.



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Corcoran attended the Digital Tourism Think Tank Conference in Barcelona late last year, where 200 marketers and digital experts from various tourism boards around the world (including Cape Town Tourism) shared their digital marketing plans.

Drawing from this experience - and her analysis of trends and leadership in the destination marketing field - Corcoran has identified 10 top trends that are evolving in the ever-more competitive destination marketing space:

1. **Crafting content that tells not sells:** As the global obsession with travel continues, armchair travellers are increasingly voyeuristic, looking to first-hand experiences and everyday stories to spin the compass on their next visit. Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) must embrace the opportunity to harness the authentic stories of global travellers, social media influencers and locals by curating and sharing their experiences and observations with a world hungry for real experiences. Technology has become the campfire around which these stories are being told - with Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TripAdvisor, Wayn and Pinterest keeping the coals aglow. What's more - the story merely starts with the booking, and then plays out during, and long after, the visit;
2. **Creating opportunities for visitors to become locals:** As Millennial traveller numbers start to snowball, bucket lists have become more personal than prescribed. Table Mountain is merely the backdrop to a selfie, before this traveller slips into the shoes of the locals - experiencing what it is to live the 'real life' of a destination. Meeting local shopkeepers, renting someone's home and hiring a pair of bicycles ticks all the boxes as touristy attractions give way to unexplored neighbourhoods that get real on every level. Celebrating the role of the local citizen is the key to fostering good feelings and nurturing lifelong relationships;

3. **Optimising channels for three-screen viewing:** DMOs across the planet have experienced massive user migration to mobile platforms as would-be visitors and in-destination travellers digest their info on tablets and smartphones. Optimising destination websites for mobi - with further buzz about responsive tech like meta-search, apps and mobile payment - is a migration that is non-negotiable. Don't think trend, think seismic shift;
4. **Providing inspiration before information:** Where once the DMO or tourism board was the 'Yellow Pages' of the destination; today's knockout tourism websites are image driven, emotive and absorbing. Information still counts, but most journey planners will mine multiple sites and refer to user reviews to plot their trips. Creating a visual imprint cuts through the clutter, speaking to that thing in all of us that is called to exchange realities and make memories;
5. **Facilitating storytelling through influencers:** The conversation is happening in the midst of the experience. Traditionally, visitors would rely only on the advice and information of the DMO to create their itinerary - and some still do - but increasingly DMOs are part of a conversation being created by online influencers. From witty housewives to full-time professional bloggers, the landscape has gone from being one defined by the authority of a few to a kaleidoscope of opinions, snapshots and observations; a world in which 'likes' keep the 'love' flowing. Facilitating and strengthening the conversation has become pivotal to the role of the DMO - as a connector between the destination and its fans (and detractors) they cannot afford to take their eye off the feed;
6. **Valuing quality rather than quantity in social media:** Engagement is the buzzword, but achieving it takes real commitment and an integrated sense of what both brand and destination stand for. Asking your team to absorb this into their DNA means that DMOs must have a compelling story to begin with, followed by the trust to let others carry that conversation forward. This means moving beyond pre-populated posts and into real-time engagement. Destinations that are getting this right are ever present; listening, responding and expanding;
7. **Placing the destination first and the DMO second:** The days of sun-streaked billboards with 'look here' messaging and multiple logos are over. In 2015, DMOs are reinventing their role by placing the destination, and not the destination brand, in the limelight. Inspiring images, free from ownership, interpretation and instruction, capture the imagination and ignite the desire to 'be there'. For Cape Town the material is endless, our job is to curate the best of it and to put it in places that people will find it;
8. **Truly understanding that we can't please everybody:** Crafting the message is perhaps one of the most challenging facets for the DMO. Always alert to celebrating the abundance on offer and face to face with an evolving audience that wants diverse things, the DMO needs to draw on his discipline to curate a series of central ideas and themes that stick. In 2015, we will see that it's the quirkier destinations, those brave enough to take a stand that catch the limelight. Destinations that try to tick every box will end up looking like everyone else. The DMO opens the door on a destination, best to ensure that door is clearly marked - and not revolving;
9. **Trialling, refining and trialling again:** Where once the launch of a product was the end point of the process, today's economic climate and the expectation of adaptability has called on us to rethink the idea that there is a beginning, a middle and an end. The notion that a business, idea or project is constantly functioning as a prototype encourages creativity, boldness and agility: fail fast and learn quickly. DMOs who are free to experiment, tweak and recreate will be the ones who start to show true innovation and results; and
10. **Collaborating rather than competing:** Skint budgets, a shortage of time and a common purpose all add up to avoiding disaggregation of effort. Creating systems and trust for collaborative projects and common messaging goes a long way towards selling a destination clearly and authentically. Learning from mega-events, global and local crises; today's DMO sees the power of partnership and looks to integrate with co-sector and cross-sector role players to expedite progress and maximise value. Check your ego at the door, agree on common practice and principle, and remind yourself that the whole purpose is to sell the destination.

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