

# How can tourism boost opportunities for Zimbabwe?

According to an analysis by African Sun Limited, Zimbabwe is currently ranked 117th among the most likely travel destinations in the world category as compared to South Africa which ranks 60th. As such, politicians should shift their focus from recent election result to the future of the country, which boasts multiple opportunities especially in that of the tourism industry, says Rishabh Thapar, HVS Africa associate director, as tourism could play a massive role in alleviating both economic and political instability.



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"The country, which is under severe external debt, needs to be able to gain access to credit. The government would need to create favourable policies, stamp out corruption and create and/ or revive its own currency – this requires their undivided focus."

Thapar believes that one of the major plans for the new government should be to restore financial and political stability by involving its skilled workforce in national building programmes and schemes. "More than three million Zimbabweans are estimated to be living outside their country, having left the country for better economic prospects during the last two decades. This accomplished workforce with their experience of living abroad would certainly play a crucial role in the rise of Zimbabwe if they were to return to their country."

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He explains that a phase of restoring confidence among its citizens and the international community could usher an era of increased domestic and foreign investment and growth which perhaps has remained stunted for a better part of two decades.

## Economic upliftment strategies

"Tourism policies and infrastructure can create massive opportunities for an economy. Not only through job creation and direct or indirect income from tourism activities but also creating an opportunity for interaction and business avenues," says Thapar.

"According to World Travel and Tourism Council, while the direct contribution of travel and tourism to Zimbabwe's GDP was 3.5%, the total contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP - including wider effects from investment, the supply chain and induced income impacts – was over 8% in 2016 and 2017."

Most travel itineraries in Southern Africa do not explore Zimbabwe's tourist attractions beyond the famed Victoria Falls. "This presents an opportunity. Zimbabwe has abundant natural attractions such as Nyanga National Park, Matopos National Park, Hwange National Park, Lake Kariba, The Great Zimbabwean Ruins and Chinhoyi Caves, which all need to be promoted and established into itineraries and tourism circuits," adds Thapar.

He recommends that a master plan for all these destinations is developed to enhance the tourist's experience and ultimately increase the length of stay in the country. While the plan should focus on airlines, connectivity, hotels and tourism infrastructure/activities, Thapar concludes that the government would also need to invest into building a long-term tourism policy for preservation and conservation while providing incentives for private investments.

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