

Remaining relevant in an ever-evolving tourism industry

Today's modern traveller is more connected than ever, especially since tourism is evolving at such a significant pace. With travellers working on the go and considering their carbon footprint more, businesses need to keep abreast of the latest trends to retain their offering's relevancy.



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"The world has opened up a little more, and we are starting to see a number of previously less travelled destinations becoming ticket items on travellers' 'bucket lists', this puts pressure on South African tourism businesses to do more to keep pulling in the positive travel numbers," says Charnel Kara, tourism specialist at FNB Business.

South African tourist arrivals increased by 12.8% in 2016, exceeding 10 million visits. Comparing 2016 to 2015, there was an increase recorded in most of the key inbound indicators except for the length of stay.

Kara shares four megatrends impacting tourism right now:

Technology: Online bookings portals that allow customers to view availability, make a booking and pay immediately are becoming a non-negotiable.

Another technological advancement in attracting and retaining customers is being able to offer limited and/ or unlimited Wi-Fi. Social media is another opportunity for businesses to engage with clients on a platform which they enjoy.

Intergenerational travel: There is a growing number of people who travel as an intergenerational family, this is usually three generations of a family (grandmother and grandfather, mom and dad, and the children).

It's an opportunity to pass along core values, skills, and interests, embedding them in the context of experiential travel.

The lone traveller: There is a growing number of young people who prefer to travel solo. Solo travel is about treating yourself to an experience and enjoying every moment.

One of the many contributing factors is that people are choosing to get married later, so they have more time to spend as single adults. However, even married people are deciding to travel alone where couples make a conscious decision to travel separately as a result of differing work schedules or family commitments.

Green is the new king: A growing number of tourists are actively ensuring that they decrease their carbon footprint. This translates to the type of destination, accommodation and activities they go on to partake in.

Greener buildings are becoming the new norm, and when those cannot be accessed, customers tend to seek the most suitable alternative which they feel has the impact on the environment.

Kara concludes by saying that the South African tourism sector is well poised to adapt to these major trends. "Businesses in this sector need to continue to progressively evolve as they have over the last 20 years. The competitive edge here is in remaining resilient, continuously evolving and embracing global trends and best practices."

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