

4 ways to thrive as a SA hospitality SME in winter

Tourism remains a vital pillar of South Africa's economy, contributing around 8.8% to the country's GDP in 2024. The sector thrives on the country's scenic beaches, wildlife reserves, and vibrant hospitality industry. However, as winter sets in, many businesses find themselves unprepared for the seasonal downturn.



Source: [Pexels](#)

In June 2023, Cape Town's hotel occupancy rate dropped to 53%, a stark contrast to December when accommodations across South Africa were almost fully booked.

“Summer, especially in coastal areas, may be peak hospitality season but winter can also hold opportunities for the astute and well-prepared business owner,” says Kevan Govender, regional investment manager at Business Partners Limited, who shares key strategies to help hospitality businesses thrive during the winter slow-down.

1. Understand seasonal trends

Like weather patterns, consumer behaviour can also inform trend forecasts. Winter historically sees more interest in warm indoor spaces, comfort food, warm beverages, and winter getaways in the countryside. It also raises interest in health-related goods as the rate of colds and flu increases.

“If you know what's coming, you know how to prepare,” says Govender.

“Kauai is a brand that adjusts its offering seasonally and has found phenomenal success with its winter menus that feature warm bowls, soups, and a signature ‘floo juice’. Look at the data and make informed adjustments in your business.”

2. Invest in maintenance

Winter is the ideal time to deep clean, repair general wear and tear, and upgrade rooms or appliances. Business owners should prioritise preventive maintenance on heating systems, plumbing, and backup power solutions as load shedding persists year-round.

Regular servicing of your business equipment ensures they function efficiently and last longer, saving you money on replacements.



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“Use downtime to tackle issues to ensure your property remains safe, efficient, and guest-ready when peak season returns,” says Govender.

3. Increase online visibility

As of 2025, 66% of hotel rooms were booked online through Booking.com, Trivago, and AirBnB, indicating a significant shift toward digital booking platforms.

This trend underscores the importance of hospitality businesses maintaining a strong online presence – especially throughout winter – for consumers planning special occasions, weekend getaways, or even a cosy night out.

“You should take advantage of digital marketing tools by sharing engaging, seasonal content featuring your warm, inviting space and winter menu highlights, or encouraging winter-themed guest reviews,” says Govender.

“Consider offering limited-time winter promotions or partnering with local influencers to extend your reach and procure sales directly from social media.”

4. Use credit wisely

Traffic may slow down in winter, but the cost of running a business does not. Seasonal expenses like increased electricity bills for heating, higher water usage, retaining staff during low occupancy periods, and maintenance of weatherproof facilities can put pressure on cash flow.