

# Empowering youth in South Africa's travel industry

 By [Sam van Gool](#)

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For South Africa's travel industry to prosper long-term, young school leavers and employees must be convinced of the many exciting opportunities and chances for skills development a career in travel will bring.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

Millennials are already the largest segment in the international workforce, with Generation Z hot on their heels. The South African travel industry employs 1 in 10 people based on estimates by the Tourism Business Council of South Africa. By empowering young people already in travel, we are guaranteed to increase travel's benefits to the economy.

Nourishing new and young talent is something the Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG) takes very seriously, and we believe it's why the group has consistently featured in the Deloitte Best Company to Work For Awards.

As South Africa celebrates #YouthMonth, here's how we're working to future-proof the travel industry in South Africa, and its diverse workforce:

## Identify potential

Educating the youth on the promise and potential of the travel industry will entice more applicants.

In 2018, the Association of Southern African Travel Agents' (ASATA) first [Travel Market Index report](#) about the retail sector revealed close to 9,000 people are directly employed in travel (retail) and the sector is well represented by females at 73%. "Although not yet representative of the racial profile of the country," ASATA said, "almost two-thirds (64%) of employees are black, and 45% are black females."

Our recruitment process is such that an individual's skills and attitude is thoughtfully considered and has helped to identify promising talent. Hands-on industry experience and technical skills can be learned. However, eagerness to learn, adaptability, flexibility, curiosity about the world, a passion for people and a drive to succeed, we believe, cannot be taught. Businesses that seek out these skills will benefit in the long run.

There is not a one size fits all approach when it comes to a travel industry career, either. Are you a young person with great marketing, financial or IT skills? The industry doesn't just need travel consultants. Opportunities exist across the supply chain, as tour operators, within the airline, hospitality and car rental sectors, and there are various career possibilities for each.

## **Attracting talent**

Telecommuting has blurred the lines between life and work and more and more employees are working remotely. Flexible working arrangements will help attract young talent.

At our newly designed Johannesburg HQ, we have optimised employee workspaces for higher productivity and efficiency and made these spaces inspirational. There are various mental wellness programmes, a gym and yoga classes.

It's not just wellness benefits that companies can use to attract talent. For example, FCTG doesn't have a conventional human resources department. Instead, we have what's known as a Peopleworks department, which looks after our people's success and wellbeing.

Employee benefits should be holistic and encompass all aspects of one's life.

Make it a priority to invest in training and education. Consider strategic learnership programmes and invest in tertiary education for promising young people leaving school.

## **Retention and career growth**

By prioritising people and company culture, businesses can retain young staff and nurture career growth.

Education never stops, no matter how old or experienced you are. For all travel consultants, there is also the ASATA Professional Programme, which enables travel agents to qualify for an accredited professional designation, recognising and rewarding their expertise.

Employees shouldn't forget their responsibility for their own up-skilling.

The world is changing so fast that most people believe today's school learners will one day perform jobs that don't yet exist! Continual up-skilling has never been more vital or easier to achieve. The beauty of technology is that with one quick swipe or click you can be logging into a virtual conference or supplier webinar, taking an eLearning course, listening to a TedTalk or podcast, seeing real-time images and videos of places around the world on social media.

Flexibility and empathy are also essential for staff retention.

Voluntourism is another significant trend, especially concerning [millennials](#). It leads to job satisfaction, the one thing that the market wants more than anything - even money.

## Growth through travel

Creating a culture of travel amongst all South Africans, of all ages, is incredibly close to the hearts of our leaders, and company as a whole.



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The importance of intra-Africa travel, including domestic tourism, and travel further abroad, starts at home.

Someone considering a career in travel is forgiven for thinking that it's going to involve 365 days of glamorous travel, but that's not the case. Still, travel is undoubtedly one of the best perks of the job.

Although by and large, a career in travel means that you are going to be sitting in an office for 48 weeks of the year planning dream trips for other people, when those travel opportunities do present themselves, they're priceless.

Personal travel is also encouraged, whether it's enjoying a staycation in your home city, a local destination or flight to foreign lands. Travel teaches us skills that can't be learned in any classroom.

I always tell our recruits that if they would like a career for life, the travel industry is the place for them.

Let's sharpen our weapons of empowerment to attract and develop fresh young talent and agile managers who will lead us successfully into the future of travel.

## ABOUT SAM VAN GOOL

Sam van Gool is the leader of Flight Centre's recruitment division Peopleworks.  
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