

Travel megatrends transforming Africa

Travel is an ever-shifting industry; how visitors adapt in their preferences is a challenge for any tourism and hospitality professional to identify and meet their requirements in order to stay relevant. These trends differ from continent to continent, so it's necessary to maintain a global perspective when marketing to different source markets.



Enver Durniny is CEO of Cape Town Tourism

According to the [Euromonitor's Megatrends Shaping the Future of Travel report](#) released this week, global inbound international arrivals are expected to grow by 5% to 1.4 billion trips in 2018. This amounts to total travel sales that are expected to fall just short of US\$2.5 trillion for the year. We must utilise all our resources in tapping into the immense potential this represents.

The same report lists what it terms “Megatrends”, i.e. trends that are more than mere fads that have an impact on how people travel and how they approach in-destination experiences.

Seamless experiences

One such trend is for visitors to be able to have an entirely seamless visitor experience from start to finish. This extends to points of entry and departure from a country. This has been an ongoing struggle of ours in tourism, since unwieldy processes hinder access for visitors, although we are assured by Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom that this challenge is being addressed. For us, it's more than a trend, it's a critical point that speaks to sustainability in tourism for the country – after all, if it's easier to access a country, then why would potential visitors go to a country that's tricky to enter?

Aspects relating to seamlessness include biometric entry point measures, facial recognition cameras in hotels, online check-in and keyless entry, holistic mobility solutions and other smart city initiatives, as well as frictionless payment facilities. The digital traveller has increasingly come to expect such solutions, and we are steadily managing to meet their expectations.

For example, SnapScan's development in Africa allows travellers to benefit from a mobile, cashless and cardless payment product; while the continent is coming online at a faster rate than any other continent on the planet, there are many parts of Africa and South Africa that need such solutions, since infrastructural challenges may impede payment processes. It's simple: travellers don't necessarily want to carry around large amounts of currency, so this solution addresses the challenge well.

Trading down

Another trend addressed in the report is that of "trading down". The author compared world travel markets in this sense: for developed countries, the middle class is battling to maintain an economic status quo enjoyed for decades, but in developing regions such as Africa and Asia, there is a booming growth of the middle-class market, translating into a greater desire to travel for leisure purposes, as well as boosting business travel.

While the tourism industry in Africa has historically catered to the wealthy international traveller, resulting in a strong focus on inter-regional flight networks and high-end lodging, there's room for diversification. Opportunities to meet the demand for low-cost carrier flights and more segmented accommodation exist to cater for this growing market.

These trends are just a couple that are moving the bar for the tourism sector, but it's a bar that must move to ensure that we act on our future-forward strategies for tourism growth and sustainability.

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