

The importance of reliable data to reposition South Africa's tourism industry

By  Emily Djock

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The path of recovery for South Africa's tourism industry is full of ruts and twists, and a few dead ends which have forced us to turn back on several occasions. But just as you wouldn't strike out into the unknown without a solid understanding of your route, navigating this crisis requires a great deal of intel.



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Reliable data and the smart analysis of it are key to steering the tourism industry through this time of uncertainty. But more than that, it is the blueprint for building a better road in the future and repositioning the tourism industry for sustainable success.

"A lack of reliable data is like operating in a fog," submits Dr Nomvuselelo Songelwa, Jurni CEO. "You can't see where you came from or where you're going. It's impossible to make informed decisions, and instead, you respond reactively and waste time and effort correcting missteps. This is time and effort that South Africa's tourism industry can't afford at the moment."

The need for data collection and collaboration

In an example from the frontline of the pandemic, data and insights have proven to be the spearhead of crisis response. To help inform decisions and craft interventions, health professionals and policymakers around the world have collaborated to collect and share data at every touchpoint, from testing and surveillance to tracking and tracing.

Dr Songelwa believes that South Africa's tourism sector—the first and hardest hit by the pandemic in our country—is in need of a similarly robust, collaborative and integrated data-driven response. "At Jurni, we're working to create a centralised and credible data hub for the industry. This data hub can play a vital role in helping the tourism industry make reliable and intelligent decisions for the future of tourism in the country."

The data hub will be fed by Jurni's online booking tool, communication channel and a visitor app and information portal that the company is soon launching. "We want the data hub to be as comprehensive as possible. That's why we're also calling for collaboration from the industry to come on board and help us build this initiative," says Dr Songelwa.

Clear the fog

"Data isn't a crystal ball, but it has an uncanny ability to glean insight from the past, to help inform the future," says Dr Songelwa. "By building up historic data, collected at every touchpoint, and across various sub-sectors within tourism, we gain valuable insight into trends and can better identify gaps and opportunities."

Jurni's data hub delivers reliable and robust data that can be distilled to a local and regional level.

In a time when decision paralysis is high—and that fog is creeping in—this access to data empowers tourism companies across the value chain to make strategic, informed decisions, from hiring to product development to customer engagement.

Realign with your customer

"There is no doubt the world has changed since Covid-19. And what was simultaneously occurring, while many of us understandably focussed on our business resilience, was that our customers likewise changed," says Dr Songelwa. "You can't assume that the needs of your customer in, say, January of this year are the same as the needs of your customers of tomorrow."

Analysing data on customer behaviour can shed light on new trends in preferences and priorities, help address pain point and adapt offerings. A customer-centric approach, backed by rich data insights, has never been more pertinent than now, as a means of realigning with your customer and regaining their confidence.

Jurni is also in the process of launching a visitor app and information portal. This will facilitate communication for travellers throughout the booking experience: from finding information to exploring packages and itineraries to booking their travels. The data generated through this app will also feed into the Jurni data hub.

Incite innovation

Data analytics and innovation are ideal bedfellows. Linkages or hidden patterns in data help you look at an aspect of your business in a new light and can spark fresh ideas. Data has massive potential to drive innovative progress through the adoption of new technology and digital platforms, the optimisation of internal processes, and the development of new products and services that fulfil customers' unmet needs.

"Coming out of Covid, competition in the tourism industry is going to be high—and it's not just within South Africa, it's South Africa against all other destinations," Dr Songelwa foresees. "How do we set ourselves apart? Health and safety protocols, border regulations, airline access—of course, these all play a huge factor. But what will really bring about sustainable success is if South Africa's tourism industry can embrace innovative and data-driven solutions."

"It's no easy feat to future-proof South Africa's tourism industry at a time when the future has never been more of an

unknown. But Jurni's data hub, in connection with our online booking platform, and customer-centric visitor app, is a big step forward in repositing our industry," concludes Dr Songelwa.

ABOUT EMILY DJOCK

Emily Djock is a content writer for Big Ambitions. With a background in scientific publishing, Emily combined her expertise at distilling complex information into compelling stories with her love for travel. She has a keen eye on emerging trends, technologies and innovations for the travel industry.

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