

Building a recovery plan for the tourism sector

SA Tourism is currently compiling a post-Covid-19 recovery plan for the sector. The plan will take into consideration various scenarios. These include developments in key traditional source markets such as the Europe and the US.



Sisa Ntshona, SA Tourism CEO

“If we recover before them, it does not help much because they cannot travel, we may then have to look at new source markets” SA Tourism CEO, Sisa Ntshona says.

Domestic tourism and business travel will most likely lead the recovery of tourism travel, followed by regional and international. “What remains unclear is the timing of the recovery. We are now going through a process of engaging the sector to develop the recovery plan,” he says.

What is the recovery going to look like?

“It is becoming clear that the recovery is not a recovery to the old way of doing things. There are going to be fundamental changes to the sector. There are going to be changes in travelling patterns and what consumers are looking for,” he says.

The sector can use the lull to work towards building better experiences for travelers in the future through improved visa environment, for instance.

As it compiles the plan, SA Tourism is hosting a series of webinars in order to stimulate sector discussions on solutions, scenarios and a way forward.

In the first of the webinars, the travel and tourism experts on Thursday said the outbreak was an opportunity for the sector to re-think and do things differently.

The Department of Tourism has announced a R200m relief fund in a bid to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the sector, especially SMMEs. "It is important to note that our fiscus is depleted. So how do you look after the most vulnerable businesses. The relief fund is targeted at survivalist businesses. It is really about the preservation of those businesses. We are buying time because we do not know how long the pandemic is going to last," says Ntshona.



Businesses urged to apply to tourism relief fund

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Elmar Conradie, CEO of FlySafair, says he expects the domestic sector to lead the recovery of travel and tourism. "A lot will depend on the confidence of the domestic market."

After the lockdown, the airline industry will add capacity even if there is no adequate demand initially. "Airline ticket prices are going to be incredibly cheap especially domestically. Ticket prices are going to fall dramatically which is good news for other operators in the tourism industry. This may stimulate the industry quicker into the recovery phase," he says.

Long-haul destinations are going to take longer to recover, as travellers are likely to initially prefer domestic and regional destinations, says Chris Mears, CEO of African Travel and Tourism Association (UK). Mears says work to stimulate travel post-COVID-19 must commence now.

Creating demand

"We have a captive audience as people are locked in their homes with 24/7 internet access. We have to inspire people to travel in the future and make sure that our destinations are at the top of minds.

"We have to create the demand when things start to recover. All the flights routes and frequencies will be supply and demand driven. It is vitally important that we work on a regional basis as most international tourists see Africa as a country rather than a continent so they will travel to more than one destination," he says.

"We need to take the opportunity to bring all the players together and engage on what we need to do to unblock the hinderances to tourism. We need to improve our fundamentals first," says Sun International COO, Graham Wood.

He says domestic tourism must be spread widely across the country. But he says costs to destinations outside the "golden triangle" of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban are high. "It is still expensive to fly to George and Nelspruit."

Ntshona says, as global tourism has ground to a halt after the outbreak, it is appropriate to solicit views from the sector. "We want to hear from the ground up. When the recovery plan is put together, it must represent the views of Team Tourism," he says.