

Responsible tourism enabling the new normal

Responsible tourism is a growing trend. People enjoy traveling and want to leave the area they visit in a better position along with being respectful to the people and the environment. How does the industry respond to this?

This was discussed by a panel at Africa's Travel Indaba. Moderated by Sisa Ntshona, CEO of South African Tourism, he believes it is not about the what but the how. "We want to promote responsible tourism, and do it in the best manner possible, while being consistent in this space and protecting the tourism environment. To do this we all need to collaborate and work together to position South Africa."

Government, the correct policies and regulations in place are needed to bring about responsible tourism says panellist, Morongoe Ramphele, Deputy Director General: Tourism Sector Support Services. She explains that they define responsible industry through the triple bottom line by way of economic growth that is respectful, environmental integrity and ensuring communities are not infringed on in terms of what they value and subsist on.

"The African Responsible Tourism Awards are not the most glamorous, but they speak to the survival of the industry and the triple bottom line encapsulates it," says Sadia Nanabhay, who has worked extensively in responsible tourism. "Responsible Tourism boosts the benefits and mitigates the negatives of tourism. We want to shine a light on how it can be done and done well."

Jane Edge joined the board of Fair Trade Tourism (FTT) and she says recently there has been resistance by locals across the world against tourism, because of its negative impacts such as price inflation.

"The Millennial traveller is on trend when it comes to travel. This group is looking for offbeat, authentic experiences. This is core to responsible tourism. Entities in this space can also create cool brands that appeal to this group of people," she says.

It is not only Millennials interested in this, says Nanabhay but the new experiential tourist is looking for what makes people tick. "They want to eat the food of the locals and experience how they live. It is about the five senses. But before tourists appreciate a place, the people who live in it need to."

She adds that the trick is changing people's behaviour. "There are different ways. Florence has taken a hard-line penalising tourists for bad behaviour. The other way is to encourage good behaviour and appeal to people's good nature. Research shows that the most effective way is keeping up with the Jones. For example, if the last guests had no towel changes it is likely to influence one's own behaviour. However, you need a number of strategies working together to change people's behaviour."

Judy Lain, the Chief Marketing Officer of Wesgro, adds to this whilst talking about the drought in Cape Town. “After talking to many hotels about what they did, we found that the most effective solution was making people part of the solution. Taking a hard line is not as effective as stating the problem upfront and making the tourist part of the solution. By stating that one in five countries will experience a drought by 2050 but that the visitor can be part of the solution was the most effective in changing behaviour.”

Lain adds that before the drought in Cape Town, they thought they were doing responsible tourism. “But when it hit, we realised there were massive gaps. As consumers we had to learn to respect the water. As business we learnt that we can be responsible as well.”

Following the drought there was a backlash against tourism, and tourist numbers dropped. “We had to educate them that it was socially irresponsible to cancel their trips. In the high season tourists only add one percent to the population of the Cape. We had to ensure that tourists understand water consumption and usage. “

Concluding the discussion Ntshona says: “Instead of becoming a victim, Cape Town is now leading the world in how to respond to a water crisis.”

“When it comes to tourism, if we only focus on profit, then we will miss out on the bigger picture,” he adds.

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Owned and managed by South African Tourism, Africa's Travel Indaba has established itself as the world's leading African tourism trade show. Africa's Travel Indaba attracts about 7 000 delegates from all over the world. In 2017 more than 1 000 exhibiting businesses from 18 African countries showcased an array of travel and tourism offerings to almost 1 500 local and international travel buyers and shared stories with over 700 media platforms. More than 20 000 business meetings were held over the three-day period, making this one of the most successful business platforms for African tourism.

The 2018, Africa's Tourism Indaba trade exhibition will be held from Tuesday 8 to Thursday 10 May in South Africa at the Durban Inkosi Albert Luthuli Convention Centre. Monday 7 May is BONDay for exhibitor business networking and engagement.