

## **South Africa proves to the world that responsible tourism does work**

There were over 1.4 billion tourist arrivals in the world in 2018, with that number expected to rise as travel accessibility continues to open up. This according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO).

Economically this may be a boon for many countries, but the fact remains that tourism, as an industry, contributes 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions. With the projected growth of tourism, the environmental impact is set to follow suit. That is, unless, the industry looks inward and places sustainability at the centre of its focus.

As one of the world's largest industries, tourism and all its representative bodies around the world, have committed to investing in sustainability in what has become part of the new normal. UNWTO declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, pleading nations to commit themselves to sustainability within the sector – marking the beginnings of new and irreplaceable way forward.

In the words of UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai, spoken at the World Tourism Day celebrations in Doha, Qatar in 2017, “The question is how we can enable the powerful global transformative force of tourism to contribute to make this world a better place and to advance sustainable development in all its five pillars: economic, social, environmental, cultural and peace.”

With the recent water crisis providing much needed perspective, South African Tourism has recently taken up the challenge of ushering in a new era of responsible tourism. From water-conscious PR campaigns to green exhibiting to SMME development, the South African tourism sector is leading the charge for sustainable (and viable) practices that the world should take note of.

For the past 8 years, South African Tourism has been partnered with the Event Greening Forum (EGF) on the biggest business travel trade show on the continent, Meetings Africa. This event has recently been shortlisted for the 2019 African Responsible Tourism Awards, which recognises African organisations that offer a shining example of how tourism can benefit local people, the environment and destinations.

The Meetings Africa 2019 Green Stand Awards seek to recognise exhibitors who go that extra “green” mile to build and design stands that are environmentally and socially sustainable.

The stands are judged against the EGF award criteria including design, materials, operations, transport, communication, beyond green and innovation. Exhibitors were afforded the opportunity to participate in the competition by showcasing their stand at the exhibition and submitting a written motivation explaining why their stand is green.

2019 will see this relationship being extended to include the continent's largest travel trade show, Africa's Travel Indaba, where the green stand awards will be introduced for the first time.

The partnership with the EGF drives ecological initiatives such as recycling at the event, provision of filtered tap water to cut down on the use of plastic water bottles, and the option to donate stand materials for re-use.

It is clear that South Africa, and its tourism sector, is not afraid of the “new normal”. Nowhere is this more evident than in the way South Africa's tourism capital, Cape Town, responded to the infamous water crisis.

While this global issue is not exclusive to South Africa's Mother City, Cape Town, however, is showing cities around the world what it means to respond to water restrictions. So successful the city has been that UNWTO and the World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF) recently selected Cape Town as one of 15 top global destinations to provide a case study that demonstrates the city's global status and its potential to influence world travel according to both its popularity and its practices in operating under sustainable tourism conditions.

Already recognised as a leading climate-conscious green city, being consistently voted in as one of the world's most sustainable cities, Cape Town managed to cut its water usage in half from 1.2bn litres a day in 2015 to just over 500m litres at the beginning of 2018 – proving that tourism standards don't have to drop with the water levels.

The city partnered with local and national tourism bodies to drive the message internationally, that the city remains open for business, and is ready to continue welcoming tourists.

In line with this, South African Tourism, in collaboration with the local industry, created a highly successful PR campaign and international roadshow, which created awareness of the importance of tourism to the South African economy, and highlighted innovations being implemented by the country's tourism trade, such as the introduction of desalination plants within hotels, and water recycling systems employed in tourist attractions like the V&A Waterfront, and Robben Island.

As an example, and a proverbial drop in the bucket compared to collective efforts, The Twelve Apostles, Cape Town's most luxurious 5-star accommodation, managed the seemingly impossible. From 2017 to 2018, the hotel managed to reduce water consumption by a staggering 42% by fitting shower heads with restrictors, converting fresh water hotel swimming pools to salt water, replacing napkins and placemats that need to be washed with biodegradable paper ones and reducing water usage in laundry facilities by 90% through innovative technologies.

In the end, and in environmentally and economically conscious times, it all comes down to responsibility, and tourism is no exception. The simple, yet highly impactful way the South African tourism trade is creating awareness around the responsible use of resources to grow a sustainable tourism economy. It is a future all industries need to strive towards and one that tourism in South Africa is helping to lead us all towards.