

Emirates - transforming travel and fostering connections in southern Africa

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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In this interview, Emirates' southern Africa regional manager, Afzal Parambil, offers insights into the airline's three-decade impact on the region's travel and tourism sector.



Source: Supplied

Since beginning operations in South Africa in 1995, Emirates has expanded its flight operations, introduced innovative services, and formed strategic partnerships, shaping the travel experience throughout Southern Africa.

Additionally, Parambil discusses Emirates' commitment to enhancing South Africa's global connectivity and supporting the local economy. They do this by promoting South African culture and tourism globally, helping tourism bounce back after the pandemic, and investing in the development of local talent in aviation.

Here, we explore how Emirates keeps travel booming and cultures connected across southern Africa.

❏ ***Can you highlight Emirates Airlines' key milestones and transformations in southern Africa over the last three decades?***

Certainly. Emirates Airlines commenced operations in South Africa in 1995, starting with three weekly flights to Johannesburg. Notable milestones include the introduction of daily flights to Cape Town in 2008 and Durban in 2009.

Currently, Emirates operates 42 weekly flights to South Africa, demonstrating our dedication to regional connectivity. Throughout this journey, Emirates has remained focused on innovation and customer satisfaction, striving to enhance the travel experience for passengers within South Africa and globally.

❏ ***How has Emirates influenced South Africa's travel landscape? Can you discuss the key partnerships or initiatives that have driven this change?***

Emirates has significantly influenced South Africa's travel landscape through strategic partnerships and initiatives.

Some of our key collaborations include a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with South African Tourism to jointly promote South Africa as a destination, showcasing the rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and diverse attractions that South Africa has to offer.



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This led to various activities such as familiarisation trips, consumer events, and travel workshops, in our network to support this objective.

Additionally, Emirates has engaged in joint activities with the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (Satsa) and other industry partners, including hotels and tour operators, to support tourism initiatives in the region.

Furthermore, in response to the challenges posed by Covid-19, we partnered with the Association of South African Travel Agents (Asata) and the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET) to provide online training for new travel professionals.

These efforts reflect our commitment to promoting South Africa and enhancing the travel experience while supporting the local tourism sector's growth.

■ ***How have Emirates' first-class suites influenced luxury travel perceptions in the region?***

There's been a great demand for luxury travel in South Africa, and our First-Class suites have been well-received. Flying First Class with Emirates is an unforgettable experience, offering an unparalleled level of comfort, privacy, and personalised service, setting a new standard for premium travel experiences.

In addition to spacious and elegantly designed cabins, our first-class passengers enjoy a range of exclusive amenities and services, such as chauffeur-driven transfers to and from the airport, access to luxurious airport lounges, and a dedicated in-flight service provided by our highly trained cabin crew.

Our commitment to excellence extends to every aspect of the first-class experience, from the finest dining options curated by world-renowned chefs to the latest entertainment systems and amenities designed to ensure maximum comfort during the journey.

By offering such exceptional first-class experiences, Emirates has not only raised the bar for luxury travel but has also attracted discerning travellers seeking unparalleled comfort and convenience. Our first-class suites have become synonymous with luxury and sophistication, further enhancing the reputation of Emirates as a leading global airline.



Afzal Parambil, Regional Manager, Southern Africa, Emirates Airlines.

■ ***Could you elaborate on how partnerships, like with South African Airlines, have enhanced connectivity?***

Our codeshare agreements and interline partnerships with South African Airlines, Airlink, Cemair, and Safair have been crucial for our growth, expanding our reach to almost 60 regional points in Africa.

The longstanding partnership with South African Airlines dates back to 1997 and extends to our loyalty programme, enabling passengers to earn and redeem Skywards Miles on South African Airlines flights to over 57 destinations across the continent and 11 intercontinental routes from Cape Town and Johannesburg.

We have also scaled our codeshare partnership with Airlink, providing seamless connectivity to 44 cities in the region via Emirates gateways.

Through our interline agreements, we unlock access to luxury travel destinations, such as Margate and Plettenberg Bay, exclusively operated by Cemair. Likewise, our interline agreement with FlySafair enables Emirates passengers to reach domestic points such as Port Elizabeth, East London, and George.



Source: Supplied

■ ***Regarding talent development, how does Emirates prioritise career opportunities for South Africans in aviation?***

We're committed to talent development in South Africa. The Emirates Group directly employs over 1,120 South Africans across the business, such as Emirates Engineering and Emirates Airport Services, as well as 570 cabin crew and 260 pilots.

A quarter of our South African colleagues have been with the Emirates Group for 10+ years, demonstrating our commitment to nurturing talent and providing a wide range of development prospects that enable employees to gain world-class expertise.

■ ***Lastly, how does Emirates ensure South Africa stays globally connected, and what future developments can travellers expect?***

At Emirates, we are dedicated to ensuring seamless connectivity for South Africa and the broader region. We understand the importance of maintaining strong partnerships and expanding our network to meet the evolving needs of travellers.

To achieve this, we continually assess market demand and strategically plan our routes and services to optimise connectivity. This includes regular reviews of our flight schedules, fleet deployment, and route network to ensure that we are effectively meeting the needs of passengers.



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We actively seek opportunities to enhance the travel experience for our customers through innovative initiatives and product offerings. For example, we are in the process of introducing Airbus A350 aircraft and Premium Economy class to our global fleet, which will provide passengers with even greater comfort and convenience during their journeys.

Furthermore, we are committed to promoting South Africa as a premier tourist destination on the global stage.

Through targeted marketing campaigns, joint promotional activities with tourism authorities, and participation in industry events and trade shows, we aim to raise awareness of the country's attractions and encourage travellers to visit.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on driving growth and innovation in the aviation sector while continuing to prioritise the needs of our customers and partners.

By leveraging our extensive network, cutting-edge technology, and unwavering commitment to excellence, we are confident that we can further enhance connectivity and contribute to the continued development of South Africa's tourism industry.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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