

The tourism industry will have to put up a tough fight amid the recession

 By [Enver Duminy](#)

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It's like round three in a boxing match; we've taken blows from all corners - the Ebola outbreak of 2014, the visa debacle, the drought, and now, as if it's the final punch, a recession. Somehow, the tourism sector continues to survive for another round, nursing wounds and getting back up. But this latest blow could see tourism falling against the ropes, unless measures are taken to rescue it.



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According to StatsSA, household spending is down: households spent less on transport (down 6.1%), food and non-alcoholic beverages (down 2.8%), clothing and shoes (down 6.8%) and recreation and culture (down 7.6%) during the past quarter. Money is tight, and yet still South Africans are managing to travel. They're heading to the coast for a week, disappearing into the countryside for a sneaky weekend or taking trips to network with business partners; the airports are busy, and hotels are bustling with activity. It hardly seems like there's a challenge, but, at some point, the rubber will hit the road, and incomes will be negated by the rising costs of living.

A brief examination of the surge in the petrol price alone underscores this, especially since fuel costs contribute in turn to a jump in pricing for all road-supplied goods, including food.

Real engagement for survival

In the Cape, we've been battling with a drought that hasn't just threatened the industry, it's affected the lives of everyone who lives or travels here. We've learned how to adapt our daily routines, everything from long baths to short showers, to how we wash dishes, maintain gardens and flush toilets – we're nothing if not resilient. Indeed, efforts made by locals have seen us stave off the threat of having to queue for water as if we're in some post-apocalyptic nightmare. The flipside of this other-worldly experience is curious, as Cape Town continues to rack up accolades as a world-class travel destination.

As we hear the news of a second-quarter fall of 0.7%, and that this has officially plunged us into a recession, this isn't a time to hold back: we must push ahead with our strategies for tourism development like never before. Tourism isn't quite as volatile a sector as mining or agriculture, it's somehow managing to keep afloat, but it's essential to direct our thinking, marketing efforts and energy into working every angle to ensure that visitors keep on coming. After all, if locals start to hold back on travelling, our international market is the key to industry sustainability. For the 8% of South Africans employed in tourism, we must all focus our attention on telling the world about what a remarkable place we live in, and that they must come and explore it for themselves.

That's at a personal level; as industry professionals, the time has come to develop a collaborative strategy between the private and public sector that enables tourism to grow. From mentoring initiatives and bursaries to reducing barriers to market access for investors and SMEs, it must be made easier for businesses to roll out their plans and reach visitors. Too many SMEs collapse under the weight of the hoops they are required to jump through just to get things done – we appeal to government to intervene and make it easier for businesses to get from A to B.

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That said, the cogs are turning, albeit slowly; Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom is working with the Department of Home Affairs to iron out all the barriers to access in terms of visa requirements and birth certificate-related challenges; it takes time for this to become a reality, but we're aware that it's happening, and welcome it.

The word "recession" is an abstract one; it sounds quite depressing, if not terrifying, but its reality is a harsh one that we must face. As individuals, we take measures to deal with it, but as an industry, we must also address how we're going to cope. That can mean anything from adding value to what we have on offer via loyalty programmes or discounted packages, to ensuring that all our team members are going the extra mile when it comes to keeping our visitors entertained, enthralled and engaged. Even those of us who are not in tourism need to provide a grand welcome to every single person who has made the effort to travel here.

The secret comes in valuing what we have and not taking things for granted, in treating each other well, with respect and kindness. Tourism is at the heart of who we are, since it brings the world's cultures to our doorstep. Our key to beating the recession is to work through it together and support each other. That way we can see this boxing match through to the other side, manage the blows that come, and emerge undefeated.

ABOUT ENVER DUMINY

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