

Adaptability is vital for the recovery of the South African hospitality sector

By [Kevin Burley](#)

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Many businesses have suffered at the hands of Covid-19. Many have shut their doors altogether, while others have had to find ways to adapt to this 'new normal'. The hospitality industry has undoubtedly borne the brunt of the pandemic as travel restrictions prevented feet through doors. On the plus side, some local businesses have come out stronger, with companies like ANEW adjusting their focus to what South Africa can offer the domestic traveller.



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There's been an uptake in local travel, with many South Africans finding a renewed love, passion and appreciation for their country. At ANEW, for example, we focus on the South African experience, which in itself is quite unique and often life-changing. We live in a beautiful and diverse country, and while, historically, it's been fashionable to go to places like Dubai, London and Paris, everything a traveller needs is right here.

Under Covid-19 restrictions, hotels have had to rethink the way they operate, from staff wearing masks at all times to socially distanced dining and entertainment, among other things. In the past, a large percentage of our guests were government and corporate travellers, but now leisure seekers are looking for better ways to relax, unwind and get away. As such, we needed to relook at our customers, understand who is travelling during these times and how we can fulfil their needs.

It is also important to note that many businesses are thriving as **consumers now have different demands**. Because of this, we looked at our business differently, as what used to be the norm is no longer the case. In some fortunate way, we have been prepared for the Covid-19 pandemic without realising it as creating memories and experiences unique to South Africa has always been the essence of what we're trying to achieve and having that personal service and attention to detail is vital in all that we do.

Businesses need to almost re-educate themselves on their guests and how to operate with these new restrictions in place. Education around safety within hotels will be a trend this year, as well as learning how to work within the current limits while still respecting them. I don't really see international travel returning until possibly the last quarter of the calendar year as people need to regain confidence in travelling abroad.

There's no doubt going to be a slow pickup, therefore domestic leisure is so important right now, but we've also got to keep looking over our shoulder as there's a lot of discussion about a third wave. Businesses must respect the protocols and learn to adapt to an ever-changing landscape from a health, safety and convenience perspective.

We recently moved to a new cloud-based property management system, allowing guests more seamless integration into all stages of the booking process, from reservations to checking in and out, room service and more. These automated, **cloud-based systems** improve the guest experience, but on the flip side, we also have to think about whether this contactless future is what guests really want.

After the year we've all had, people are looking for opportunities to interact in person again. We're social creatures, and while technology has made our lives easier, it will never replace human interaction. As we advance, technology will certainly play a role in improving the overall guest experience and should be harnessed that way.

Another key trend for the next year will be guest feedback. These days, businesses are completely exposed through sites like Tripadvisor; if a guest had a bad experience, they will let the world know. Consumers are certainly more aware of safety and hygiene protocols and expect businesses to ramp up these things. What's more, spending money on travel and leisure during this time is certainly a luxury, so it is important to give guests something they can cherish for a long time.

Many businesses think that going cheaper is the way to attract more customers, but the trouble is, when you do that, it takes a long time to get the price back to what it once was. Also, radically changing prices can cause customers to feel cheated, which has a knock-on effect on the company's credibility and integrity. So businesses must find that balance; it's all about being flexible and adaptable. What makes what we do at ANEW work, is that we really believe in our product, in our brand and most importantly, in our people.

As such, I'm cautiously optimistic about the future. If we as South Africans can be respectful of safety protocols and continue to practice social distancing, we will definitely see a slow but steady recovery to the hospitality sector this year.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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