

How to revive African tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the global tourism industry contributed [US\\$9.2t](#) or 10.4%, to global GDP. It was considered one of the fastest-growing industries, accounting for at least one in every four new jobs globally.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

Fast forward to 2021, and the pandemic has all but crippled the sector. Tourism demand – arrivals, travel, and the use of facilities and services – [contracted](#) by an estimated 74% in 2020. This has cost the industry upwards of US\$1.3t and has compromised millions of jobs.

The African region [shed](#) an estimated US\$83 billion in GDP contribution (down by 49.2%), and lost up to 7.2 million industry jobs compared to 2019 levels.

The impact of health crises such as SARS, H1N1 and Ebola weren't on the scale of the disaster brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. This impact was made worse by government interventions to [mitigate](#) the spread and effect of the virus.

But vaccines offer hope for the industry. Its recovery [must begin](#) with domestic tourism. In 2019, domestic tourism [accounted](#) for only 50.2% of the travel and tourism receipts in the sub-Saharan African region – lower than other regions.

It's critical now for African destinations to promote domestic tourism, which also [paves the way](#) for international tourism. The key will be the ability to predict the potential effects of Covid-19 on tourist behaviour.

Perceived risk

As a primer to a series of future studies, I [reviewed](#) the literature on health-related perceived risk and its potential impact on post-crisis tourism. It's possible to anticipate the negative influence that perceived risk will have on tourist behaviour, and ultimately both domestic and international tourism demand.

My study provides insights into the lessons learnt from previous crises in tourism, and what tourism practitioners did to mitigate the effects of perceived risk on tourists. It also provides practical actions the sector can take to recover.

Previous [studies](#) of tourist behaviour show that the uncertainty and negative consequences of tourism often go beyond the crisis event. My study explored physical (health-related), psychological and social risk as influences on tourist behaviour.

Heightened perceived risk triggers feelings of anxiety and apprehension associated with travel and tourism. This affects the brand image of the crisis-affected countries and influences tourists' decision-making. As a result, tourists delay their trips and change their choice of destination. In some cases they cancel their planned tourist activity.

For example, as a result of the 2003 SARS outbreak, some Asian countries such as [China and Singapore](#) suffered significant slumps in tourism demand. Tourists avoided travelling to the region because of health and safety concerns.

The [Ebola outbreaks](#) in Sierra Leone and Guinea in 2008, and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) 2012 in Saudi Arabia also elicited a similar response from tourists.

International [studies](#) are already gathering evidence of the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on tourist behaviour. But previous tourism research already predicts a situation of multiple risk factors influencing tourists. Critical to post-crisis tourism will be mitigating the potential health and safety concerns that may discourage tourism.

My study found that multiple stakeholders need to be involved in the tourism recovery process. These include:

- **National governments.** They must harness the financial, human and technical resources required to support the tourism recovery. Critically, governments must effectively manage both the efficient rollout of vaccination programmes and the responsible reopening of the tourism economy to domestic and international tourists.
- **Custodians of destination brands.** Marketers must promote African destinations as attractive but socially responsible locations. They must share information such as measures put in place to protect tourists, so as to help people make their decisions.
- **Tourism service providers.** Most importantly, tourism product owners must innovate and adapt their tourism offerings to meet the demand for safe domestic tourism. This would kick-start the tourism sector and prepare it for international tourism.

Going forward

The results of my study have significant implications for African tourism practitioners. The domestic tourism sector, much like the global tourism industry, faces a multifaceted challenge. It comes from both the tourism demand side (perceived health, social and psychological risk) and the supply side (massive fiscal deficits, job losses, business liquidation and human capital depletion).

Tourism practitioners need to be aware of the influence of health-related physical risk on tourists' [perceptions](#) and intentions. It's likely that tourists will feel that home is safer than abroad. This would be a benefit for domestic tourism.

Moreover, measures such as promoting mask-wearing, sanitising, social distancing, digitising some service processes and promoting vaccination will be vital to the recovery and promotion of domestic tourism. Tourism practitioners must work out how to time supply and demand. This can include product innovation and pricing reforms to cater to domestic tourists and

keep up with new tourist demands.

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