

RIP Stanley Tollman: Hospitality entrepreneur, visionary and philanthropist

The tourism industry mourns the loss of South African-born Stanley Tollman, founder and chairman of The Travel Corporation, who has died at the age of 91 after a battle with cancer. He is celebrated as one of the architects of the global tourism industry and is known as a devoted philanthropist.



Stanley Tollman, The Travel Corporation chairman. Source: Supplied

Tollman was chairman of The Travel Corporation (TTC), his family-owned business that houses 40 award-winning brands such as Trafalgar, Contiki, Uniworld and the Red Carnation group – which includes the well-known Oyster Box, Twelve Apostles Hotel, Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve and winery Bouchard Finlayson. The company celebrated its centenary in 2020 and has over 10,000 employees in 70 countries worldwide.

According to a statement issued by TCC, Tollman was admired for his "visionary leadership, innovative approach to travel experience development, innate understanding of excellence in hospitality, and commitment to employee care. Tollman was a larger-than-life character with a dedication to his family and business that is deemed exemplary by his peers in the industry."

From humble beginning to 5-star success

Tollman was born in the small fishing village of Paternoster in the Western Cape in 1930, and it's at his family's modest Paternoster hotel that his love for hospitality took root.

Fast forward a few decades, Tollman and his wife Beatrice, whom he married in 1954, began their careers in hospitality together when they used their wedding money to purchase the Nugget Hotel in Johannesburg. Tollman took on the role of managing the front of house of the hotel, taking care of guests, the bar and restaurant and financial operations, while Beatrice managed the back of house, which included decoration, housekeeping, purchasing, and all the cooking for the restaurants and functions.

After transforming the Nugget Hotel, they went on to buy the Hyde Park Hotel, with the renowned Colony super club, which was the first to bring world-famous artists to South Africa in the mid-1950s.

From these early days, Tollman provided South Africa with its first five-star hotels, thereby bringing the South African tourist industry to a then still unknown high level of guest experience. His initial achievements in the hotel industry culminated in the family's first grand hotel, the Tollman Towers, a landmark of Johannesburg's social life and the first five-star and all-suite hotel in South Africa.



Tollman family. Source: Supplied

Dissatisfied with South Africa's apartheid state, Tollman and his family left the country in 1975. Just prior to leaving SA, Tollman adopted the policy of allowing black guests and performers into his luxury hotels despite the ruling government of the time's efforts to consolidate the prohibition of such activities under apartheid.

He also championed a programme that focused on training promising Black people in the hospitality business, unlocking employment opportunities usually reserved for Whites. Sadly, government policies increasing in pressure forced Tollman to shift his focus and energies beyond South African borders.

Reinvestment in a democratic SA

Although forced to pursue his hospitality and tourism ambitions away from his homeland, once apartheid was abolished, he returned to the land of his birth, reinvesting heavily in a democratic South Africa and South Africans from 1995.

In 2002 Tollman purchased the Twelve Apostles Hotel in Cape Town under the Red Carnation Hotel (RCH) Collection brand. A decomposing property deemed a blight in the national park was re-imagined, restored, and re-opened to become a location of high appeal, crowned by World Travel Awards as Africa's Leading Luxury Hotel in 2019 and one of the 'World's Best' by *Travel & Leisure*.

2002 was also the year Tollman bought out the major shareholder of Johannesburg-based Cullinan Holdings. The entity includes some of South Africa's best-known tourism names including Thompson's Tours, Thompson's South Africa, Pentravel travel agencies, Kruger National Park-based Indaba Safaris, and Manex yachting equipment.

In 2004, Tollman went on to purchase Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve and Wellness Centre in the Western Cape's Cederberg region as part of RCH. Ongoing property upgrades put emphasis on the reserve's unique open-air gallery of over 130 carefully preserved rock art sites, some as old as 10,000 years, created by indigenous San people.

Awards soon followed Bushmans Kloof's 2010 reopening. It was the first South Africa property to win #1 in T&L World's Best, and TripAdvisor's Hall of Fame for achieving the Certificate of Excellence for the fifth consecutive year. And in 2018 the resort was awarded Best Spa in Africa & Indian Ocean by Global Spa & Wellness Awards. Bushmans Kloof's Rock Painting Landscape was given National Heritage Status by the government of South Africa in 2019 and is currently in the process of securing a nomination for Unesco World Heritage Status.

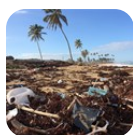
In 2006, the famous Oyster Box Hotel in Umhlanga was purchased and added to the RCH portfolio. The purchase was followed by two years of extensive restoration, and re-opened in 2009. The hotel continues to top African hospitality awards, including *Travel + Leisure's* 'World's Best' Awards No. 1 in Top 5 Resort Hotels in Africa in 2020.

Further investment saw the purchase in 2000 of Bouchard Finlayson, a small vineyard in Hermanus which has grown to become one of South Africa's leading wineries, renowned for its Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.

Social and environmental impact

Acutely aware of the need to protect the people and places visited by his portfolio of companies, Tollman set up and chaired The Travel Corporation Conservation Foundation (TTC-CF) – a not-for-profit focused on activation of community and conservation projects and partnerships.

Renamed The TreadRight Foundation in 2012, today the organisation supports over 55 projects worldwide and has developed a five-year sustainability strategy aligned to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. TreadRight engages all TTC brands in measurable efforts to embed sustainability across the business, and is championing a traveller-facing campaign, #MakeTravelMatter, to raise awareness around responsible travel choices.



TCC plans to ban single-use plastics from all operations

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Maintaining a commitment to South Africa, Tolman ensured that the TreadRight Foundation supports programmes on the ground aimed at making a sustainable difference to the lives of South Africans in need. This includes funding social development projects activated by the Amy Foundation, a non-profit in the Western Cape that offers development and empowerment programmes for over 2,000 children and youth living in at-risk communities.

The TreadRight Foundation also supports the Make A Difference (Mad) Leadership Foundation, which provides leadership development opportunities through education and mentorship, to inspire a better future for South Africa.

Tollman also harboured a passion for South African art, which inspired the annual Tollman Award for the Visual Arts,

designed to assist the development of the arts in the country. The platform awards a grant of R100,000 to recipients who have received critical recognition but are hampered by finances.

"Man of impeccable integrity"

Reflecting on the impact of Tollman, Alan Winde, premier of the Western Cape of South Africa, said: "Stanley Tollman, an inspirational entrepreneur and global business leader, a man of impeccable integrity, a loving husband, father and trusted friend. I am grateful for Stanley's advice and encouragement in my own journey, and I know he played a similar role for so many people across every continent of the world.

"I am mindful of how many people he touched through his passionate leadership in the tourism industry. Whether directly or indirectly, there are millions around the world whose lives and memories have been enriched because of Stanley and the Tollman family."

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