

# Top entrepreneurship tips from a local tourism expert

"We are hosts, not travel agents," says entrepreneur and owner of travel companies Luxury Safaris and PG Tops, Pieter Geldenhuys. Geldenhuys has been in the South African travel business for eight years and knows the industry inside and out.



Pieter Geldenhuys

Despite all the setbacks over the last eight years, like the Ebola scares, Xenophobia, the bad press on crime, and the ludicrous visa regulations, not to mention the difficulties getting into the country with a minor, South Africa remain a bucket list destination. "It's been one hell of a ride," says Geldenhuys when asked how challenging the tourism business is in South Africa.

## Test the waters

Cape Town, in particular, has grown in stature in terms of international renown, which make the industry appealing for young entrepreneurs. As in any other industry, the tourism industry can always do with bright ideas and new plans.

That said, Geldenhuys also gives bright-eyed entrepreneurs a word of caution: "If you thought this industry would strip off your boredom as a qualified engineer/IT technician/teacher/accountant, you might get disillusioned quickly and go back to

your well paid but boring vocation!"

Geldenhuys' advice to newcomers is to test the waters before you jump right in. If you want to open a guesthouse, rather start by renting out your apartment on Airbnb, live on a friend's couch and shower at the gym. If you want to start a guiding company, get a badge and start by taking people on free walking tours and live off the tips. If you want to start a transport company, start by cutting your teeth as an Uber driver.

"You need a fair smattering of idiotic guts, seed cash and luck to make it as a newcomer in this industry."

## From day job to dream job

Geldenhuys was a part-time lecturer when he approached the tourism industry. His day job was his source of income for the first year or so. His first gut move was to tap into the British and Irish Lions tour to South Africa. He thought a guided tour to Newlands, which would include your match ticket, a traditional braai before the match and the rugby would be an offering most tourists would jump at. And it was! That specific tour almost ruined Pieter financially, but it gave him a foot in the door and a whole lot of valuable experience!

"The key is to not be afraid to seize a big opportunity when it comes your way – don't bet your shirt on it either, but within limits take the bull by the horns and go for it, even if you don't quite feel prepared."

These days the Newlands Tours are mostly offered for non-profit to his mates by PG Tops. Being a sports enthusiast himself, Pieter doesn't complain about this at all. But he'll always put it together commercially for special interest groups.

## Stay on top of travel trends

Part of his success can be attributed to being one step ahead of the game. Every year, numerous travel publications and blogs predict the travel trends for the new year. Geldenhuys says that he believes one of the top travel trends at the moment is environmentally conscious tourism. Tourists don't want to take part in activities such as lion cub petting or elephant back

riding anymore, but rather want to seek out lodges and safari experiences that have a lower environmental impact. This is a big focus on his offering at Luxury Safaris, where Geldenhuys' team put together affordable luxury travel packages, tailor-made according to the client's interests, time and budget.



[Image Source: Luxury Safaris](#)

## **Tackle logistical challenges**

This offering stretches as far as booking your plane tickets and hotel stays in advance, arranging transfers between the airport and the hotel, between your daily activities, as well as transfers to the Kruger, should that be part of your desired package. “South and Southern Africa has huge distances and logistical issues, and expert advice and logistics handling is of prime importance,” says Geldenhuys. The Luxury Safari team is, therefore, your host during your stay in South Africa. They tackle the admin and uncertainties of booking the perfect holiday in South Africa with ease to ensure a stress-free time for the client. The majority of Luxury Safaris clients come from the United States, generally New York. Geldenhuys says they cater for quite a few honeymooners.

## **Maintain quality**

“To maintain quality, you need to keep your offering boutique,” says Geldenhuys. His short term goal at the moment is to build a small team of dedicated and experienced travel professionals for Luxury Safaris that can augment the existing PG TOPS Travel team. They will expand their offering for the Garden Route, as well as Victoria Falls and Botswana, and will continue with their current frequent tours to Sabi, Cape Town and the Garden Route. His next project might include an accommodation leg to the business, so watch this space.

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