

5 trends impacting the SA tourism sector in 2020

Changes in the local and global economy compel businesses in tourism to be proactive and agile in dealing with challenges and opportunities presented by evolving market dynamics. "Despite the headwinds currently impacting the South African tourism industry and the greater economy, the sector continues to be resilient and will gradually recover. As a country, priority should be placed on identifying pioneering ways of driving economic growth, creating jobs as well as enhancing the experience for travellers," says Charnel Kara, tourism specialist at FNB Business.



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Kara outlines the major trends impacting tourism this year:

Coronavirus: Disease outbreaks tend to have a major impact on the growth of the tourism sector globally, for example, the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Ebola virus and Swine Flu.

South Africa is currently on high alert and continues to monitor developments around the coronavirus outbreak. Depending on the outcome, this may likely have a major impact on tourism businesses especially with China being identified as a key growth market for South Africa.

Township tourism: There is a growing interest from foreign visitors to experience the rich and authentic vibe provided by township tourism. This is often carried out through guided tours, where travellers visit various townships across the country to experience their rich and diverse cultures, heritage sites, traditional food and entertainment, etc. This provides a great

opportunity for township-based businesses that can offer dynamic and unique experiences.

The gig economy: The growing 'gig economy' which is dominated by skilled part-time workers, freelancers or individuals with flexible working hours, is becoming an important contributor to domestic tourism in South Africa. Most of these individuals are also bleisure travellers who combine "business" and "leisure" activities, as their work requires them to constantly travel across the country.

Data analytics: The use of data and advanced AI is now enabling businesses to be more competitive by using valuable insights and travelling patterns to create personalised experiences, as well as products and services for their customers.

Climate change: Extreme weather conditions in South Africa are on the rise and continue to be a hazard for the tourism sector. Challenges currently impacting the sector range from drought, tornadoes, storms, flash floods and spread of wild fires, amongst other factors.

"Notwithstanding the imminent challenges, opportunities for growth do exist within the tourism sector. Businesses are urged to continue to adapt, be robust and evolve in line with changing market dynamics and customer needs," concludes Kara.

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