

# 6 trends that shaped 2021 in South Africa

With 2022 fast approaching, travel search engine Cheapflights.co.za has taken a look back on some of the key trends that shaped 2021 in South Africa. Analysing millions of search queries on the platform, Cheapflights reveals how South Africans navigated one of the most unpredictable years of travel.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

The key travel trends of 2021 comprise:

## 1. Domestic flight prices decreased but...

While the cost of travel out of South Africa increased by about 3.2%, those travelling locally saved some bucks with the average domestic flight costing R2,060 on average – about 6.3% less than in pre-Covid-19 times. And with many countries instituting travel bans on Africa, South Africans travelling across the continent would have paid about 0.8% less for their regional flights, too.

## 2. Cape Town still tops for South African travellers

Many travellers opted to stay closer to home with an approximate 273% increase in searches for Cape Town, specifically. Other cities that saw an increase in interest included Johannesburg (up about 249%), Durban (up about 208%), Port Elizabeth (up about 208%) and East London, which had a massive increase of about 322%.

## 3. Top trending destination for 2021: Lilongwe, Malawi

The trending destinations show the different cities that have received the highest increase in flight searches throughout the year. Lilongwe in Malawi landed on an impressive first place with an approximate nine-fold jump in searches compared to 2019. While there are some predictable ones like Zimbabwe (up about eightfold), Harare (up about sevenfold), and the Maldives (up about six-fold), other destinations like Jamaica (up about sevenfold) and Mexico (up about fivefold) also made an appearance on the list this year.

Locally, the top three domestic locations that received the largest increase in searches included Hoedspruit in Limpopo (up 561%), and Pietermaritzburg (up 473%) and Margate (up 404%), both in KwaZulu-Natal. All three broke into the top 10 trending destinations.

#### **Top 10 trending destinations in 2021 on Cheapflights for South Africans:**

1. Lilongwe, Malawi
2. Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
3. Harare, Zimbabwe
4. Montego Bay, Jamaica
5. Malé, Maldives
6. Hoedspruit, South Africa
7. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa
8. Cancún, Mexico
9. Bujumbura, Burundi
10. Margate, South Africa

### **4. South Africans are very reactive to lockdown announcements**

Following the President's announcement of a move to Level 2 lockdown earlier in September, Cheapflights.co.za saw a significant shift. The 22nd of September was the busiest day of travel in 2021. We also noted a surge in week-on-week searches for flights by about 134% for the Heritage Day weekend. Almost two-thirds of all searches were made for domestic flights with about 102% increase in searches compared to the week before the announcement, indicating South Africans' willingness to travel locally.

### **5. More travellers opted to fly in style**

Despite the economic downturn, South African travellers opted to go all out for their trips with the majority of flights being searched selecting business class. Additionally, searches for first-class flights increased by about 12% when compared to 2019.

### **6. The most inbound tourists came from the US**

While inbound searches to South Africa remained below pre-pandemic levels by about 42%, international tourism was still present throughout the year, with the most searches coming out of the US, followed by Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Canada and Switzerland.