

4 trends to watch in the tourism SMME space in 2022

While many sectors felt Covid-19's devastating financial impact, the tourism industry was ravaged, with smaller tourism operators, in particular, suffering under lockdowns. Now, as the economy starts navigating the waters of recovery, tourism SMMEs will have to take extra care in how they spend their already-stretched finances. One way to do so is to analyse and understand the tourism trends that lie ahead, and how to best leverage them.



Source: Christin Hume via [Unsplash](#)

Digital in local tourism

Technology will play a bigger role in tourism this year, especially in terms of travel marketing, says Tshepo Matlou, Head of Marketing and Communications at Jurni, a localised online travel and tourism platform.

"The pandemic fast-tracked our lives digitally, changing the way people search, shop, work, and play. Technology will become even more important in the way travel is marketed, because young people rely on technology to find, book and pay for their stays. Travel SMMEs that want to succeed will therefore have to adapt or be left behind."

The trend of digitalisation is only expected to pick up pace, advises Matlou. "Technology will be playing an even more prominent role as an economic enabler. It has so many benefits for tourism SMMEs, from increasing market visibility and growing website traffic, to creating a seamless experience for travellers looking to book a stay."

As fundamental as technology is becoming to tourism SMMEs, it can be tricky and expensive to implement. One way around this is to tap into another 2022 trend - partnering up with a bigger brand to piggyback on their tech and digital resources. SMMEs would do well to cut costs by joining hands with bigger platforms, such as Jurni, thereby boosting their online presence with travellers looking to book stays in highly localised areas.

Support local travel

Despite international travel restrictions easing, travelling within South Africa's borders will continue to be popular. People wanting to embrace the freedom of travel will still remain wary of the health risks and limitations that travelling to another

country could pose, and with SA's spectacular scenery on offer, local travel holds much allure.

An interesting new travel trend is developing alongside a sentiment held by the public for the past two years - supporting local tourism businesses, and restaurants. Aware of how tough the pandemic has been for small businesses, people have rallied to show their support - a move that's set to translate to the way South Africans will travel in 2022, doing their best to book stays at locally owned guesthouses and B&B's.

"SMMEs within the travel and tourism sector would do well to capitalise on this trend by highlighting and listing the things that make them authentic and unique," says Matlou. "Also, given the current situation, people will still want to travel safely, and stay at smaller places with less exposure to other people. As such, SMMEs are better poised to create personalised stays, with a warm, home-away-from-home feel."

Wellness or regenerative stays

The Global Wellness Institute in the US has predicted that the wellness market worldwide will grow at an "impressive 10% annual pace through 2025 when it will reach \$7t. With travellers yearning to escape cities for more nature-centric experiences, tourism SMMEs who tap into this trend will undoubtedly benefit.

"Even if your establishment isn't overtly nature orientated, look at how to make this 2022 trend work to your advantage," advises Matlou. "Are there hiking trails nearby, or holistic practitioners or spas that you can list as attractions in your area - anything that can help guests rejuvenate, destress or reconnect with nature? Consider planting a herb or vegetable garden to make guest meals or snacks from, or create eco-friendly features, like a wormery or compost area."

Celebrate occasions with travel

We've all heard stories over the past two years about people missing landmark family celebrations due travel pandemic restrictions. Micro-weddings, small birthday parties and stay-at-home honeymoons mean people will this year want to start marking special occasions with bigger gestures, such as travel getaways.

"SMMEs in the travel sector should take advantage of this by seeing how they can make a guest's stay like a celebratory experience," says Matlou.