

Together we can do so much more

 By [David Frost](#)

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Twenty-twenty was a devastating year for South Africa's tourism industry - but it was also the year that we came together as one tourism community and saw the power of true alignment and collaboration.



David Frost

Many months of lockdown and inconsistent regulations put tourism on the back foot. Nothing could have prepared us for the havoc that Covid-19 wreaked across our industry; a hangover we're likely to feel for several years as we claw back to tourism arrivals and spend seen in 2019.



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Covid has admittedly been the straw that broke the camel's back after years of battling red tape that has tied tourism's hand behind its back and prevented it from being the economic driver, the President himself has acknowledged it can be.

South Africa needs a strong tourism industry.

According to PWC's Public and Private Growth Initiative (PPGI) Report (2019), tourism is the number one industry with the potential to stimulate South Africa's inclusive economic growth and employment, creating the greatest multiplier effect – in terms of jobs, growth and export potential.

“ As the second-highest export earner for South Africa, it can be that sector that helps to reignite the economy, but for that to happen we need to be allowed to lift off... ”

This is certainly not an industry whose sole contribution to the economy is paving the way for well-heeled locals and international guests to live their best lives and enjoy a holiday. Instead, tourism is an efficient multiplier of low and semi-skilled jobs in peri-urban and rural areas, often where no other industries or opportunities exist.

Furthermore, tourism has a long and deep supply chain, from vehicle manufacturing to wine farming. This is an industry that supports 1.5 million direct and indirect jobs, offers many SMME opportunities and generates R206,5bn of supply chain and capital spend in the economy annually.

As the second-highest export earner for South Africa, it can be that sector that helps to reignite the economy, but for that to happen we need to be allowed to lift off, which means extending that private-sector collaboration to structured engagement with government.

A seat at the table

For lift-off to happen, tourism stakeholders should prioritise strong private-public partnerships and sing off the same hymn sheet if South Africa is going to reignite the economy out of these Covid-19 stormy waters.

Simply put, tourism needs a seat at the table – something that countries like the Maldives and Australia consistently get right.

Beyond ensuring private and public sector work together to enhance the interests of tourism is the need to ensure that tourism participates fully in the economic cluster and that its needs are understood in other ministries.

We see the devastating effects when it is not – unabridged birth certificates, the debacle that has been the National Public Transport Regulator (NPTR) licencing issue, to name but a few.

We need a whole-of-state approach for tourism to flourish because this industry is multi-faceted and policies, laws, regulations and actions in many national government departments may, or do, affect tourism.

The tourism sector simply cannot grow to its full potential unless several interventions are introduced swiftly to improve our competitiveness as a tourism destination, drive demand and contribute significantly in reigniting South Africa's economy.



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There's a need for political support at the highest level of government so that tourism-friendly policies in terms of air access, a favourable visa regime and tourism safety and security, can be enacted and market failures that affect Tourism be addressed.

If I was to put in place a wish list for tourism in 2021, it would include:

1. Air access

As a catalyst for tourism, South Africa is in desperate need of air liberalisation and an immediate national initiative to drive route take-up.

The example of Cape Town Air Access (CTAA) has shown the success of stakeholders collaborating in air route development. With a relatively small budget, CTAA has from 2015 – 2019 brought in 10 new airlines, 15 new routes and 20 route expansions.

2. Health and hygiene protocols

Under the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA), the entire value chain of tourism has devised and rolled out stringent health and hygiene safety programme and protocols under the banner, Travel Safe – Eat Safe.

These protocols have been based on international best practice and endorsed by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). The continued widespread adoption of [health and hygiene safety protocols](#) is critical.

3. Temporary visa waivers

Temporary visa waivers should be considered for key markets as direct or indirect airlift is introduced. Additionally, a comprehensive visa waiver review is necessary to consider how visa waivers can enable tourism while still supporting national security.

Further, a real e-visa is required, preferably by January 2021 at the latest. We have to have a best-of-breed world-class fully automated e-visa, or else we will fall further behind our competitors.

4. Tourism safety and security

To minimise crime against tourists and give tourists confidence that they are safe, we need significantly more, effective, and highly visible policing in all tourist hotspots.

This could be through special tourist accredited police (metro or SAPS) and the roll-out of the Tourism Monitors programme, both at scale.

5. Joint destination marketing

We need a strong private-public partnership between South African Tourism and the private sector to implement effective and coordinated international destination marketing.

As Satsa, we have embarked on several market linkage initiatives ourselves, such as virtual familiarisation events linking

buyers and tourism product. We have a rich, credible product base that we can marry with a buying community internationally in a buying bubble. These are the sort of things that we can unlock when we work together as the private sector, and more when working collaboratively with the public sector.

As the voice of inbound international tourism, Satsa creates a forum and space for thought leadership to flourish and that's what we want to do. We want to harness the experience, the expertise and the bounty of our members. When you work together in this way, you grow pies instead of trying to cut a shrinking pie into more pieces. And what we are looking for and constantly foster, are the bakers amongst the Satsa fold. If you put a lot of bakers together, pies get very big very quickly.

ABOUT DAVID FROST

David Frost is CEO of the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association - SATSA.
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