

How SA's travel and wine industry is coping with the Covid-19 outbreak

 By [Jared Ruttenberg](#)

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We're in trouble. Weeks, even days ago, I never thought that I'd have to pen such words. As a result of Covid-19, we're essentially being forced to navigate waters that are not only uncharted but also as stormy as can be. When I tune into the world around I'm hearing countless distress calls from individuals to large companies. Very few, it seems, have been unaffected by the pandemic.

In a very short period, we've had to come to terms with communal grief that is only experienced every few generations. In a very helpful article, author Scott Berinato reminds us that "The loss of normalcy; the fear of economic toll; the loss of connection. This is hitting us and we're grieving. Collectively. We are not used to this kind of collective grief in the air."



My work in the travel industry sees me wearing several hats. The biggest of these is that of a travel journalist. To explore South Africa and share her with our people and a very interested foreign audience is a great privilege. Living through a period of travel restrictions and lockdown is an unprecedented challenge for many and, as a result, I've had to pause all travelling. Many publications have understandably also put a temporary hold on commission work.



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Another hat I wear is that of a qualified tour guide. As you'd imagine all guiding is now also on hold and it will, unfortunately, take much longer than the allotted lockdown period for the industry to recover. Of course, the amount of hotels, lodges and restaurants that have had to close is simply devastating.

The truth is there are 1.4 million of us in the tourism industry – that is 1.4 million people who have dedicated their lives to promoting South Africa and serving in tourism. With an estimated 9% contribution to our GDP, tourism is one of South Africa's biggest industries. It's understandable that there are so many distress calls being heard. I spoke with three people whose companies or industries have all been impacted, wanting to hear what some of the initiatives have been in response.

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After taking a day or two to regroup & listening to our President's message, I wanted to offer some reflections. I'm sending huge love to tourism industry I love so deeply. We will get through this. SA has heavily depended on the 1.4 million of us in the tourism industry, and as the situation recovers it will look to us even more. When that time comes, I know we will be found ready to meet the task and wave even higher the SA flag. Social in Shutdown In the video you'll also see I've given thought to my time and content over the next 4 weeks. While in our 21 day lockdown I'll be using my platforms for the following - Motivation Mondays - Travel Tuesdays - Wine Wednesday - Throwback Thursdays - Foodie Fridays - Story Saturdays - Showcase Sundays

A post shared by Jared in Cape Town & SA (@jaredincpt) on Mar 24, 2020 at 8:55am PDT

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First, I spoke with Lauren Ritchie, the CEO of Rare Earth Retreats, and she shared some of her reflections with me:

“ As a locally-based property group, we realise that when travel restarts, our greatest support may initially come from the domestic market. To this end, we've already launched a bouquet of enticing travel specials, encouraging more South Africans to visit our properties later in the year. This will ensure that we're able to continue to run our lodges, support our staff and, at the same time, offer South Africans a chance to visit our properties at largely reduced rates. We believe wholeheartedly that we will all get through this, as long we stick together and support each other. ”

The wine industry has also been severely affected, notwithstanding the loss of income from closed tasting rooms and restaurants. As I write this, the lockdown also affects the work around harvest and exports. I asked Leanne Beattie of The Wine Girl Cape Town, an avid social media wino, what she and others are doing in this space:

“ We live life at a fast pace. So much so, that we barely get time to reflect. That's why I, together with other influencers, will be supporting the #SAWineLockdown initiative. Guided by a daily wine topic of the day, we will be encouraging wine-lovers to unpack their wine cellar and taste or show us which wineries they have supported over the years. It's time to reflect back on what you have learned and, more importantly, the good memories. Once lockdown is over, we will be ready to stock up again and will have a list of 21 wines to look out for! ”

“ Day 3 of 21 for the [#sawinelockdown](#) - show us what Chenin you have at home [pic.twitter.com/Tr4tDyGFtC](#)—
Thewinegirlcapetown (@thewinegirlCT) [March 29, 2020](#) ”

Lastly, fellow travel writer Lauren Manuel of *The Travel Manuel* shared:

“ Most of my income comes from my magazine articles and the content or ads on my blog. All have currently been halted, meaning I've lost 80% of my income. My aim now is to reach out to international magazines that are open to submissions from freelancers, trying to offer discounts on advertising on my blog, to encourage corporates and others with continued salaries to advertise small businesses, etc. I'm also trying to move into writing outside my usual scope and more on the mental health side, wellness and environmental impact pieces. ”

I think it was the great Celtic writer John O'Donoghue who said that hope is calling beauty out of its places of hiding. It was always been the sacred role of a travel writer to give hope by pointing out the stories of beauty. The beauty found in thousands of spaces, places and people.



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The impact of the coronavirus may be the biggest obstacle that we've had to face to date but, thankfully, not all the distress calls are white flags. While there will be casualties and great losses, there are voices of hope to be heard in the storm. The reality is that we've had a fair share of challenges to deal with in the past and while we may not always have all the resources we'd like, South Africans are some of the most resourceful people I've met.

In the past, South Africa has heavily depended on the tourism industry and as the situation around this pandemic begins to recover, it will look to us even more. When that time comes, I know we will be found ready to meet the task and wave the SA flag even. For there are still many stories to be told, places to be visited and beautiful people to meet.

ABOUT JARED RUTTENBERG

Jared Ruttenberg is an independent travel journalist, regularly contributing to some of South Africa's most respected publications. His social media engagement leads him to partner with various clients highlighting Cape Town, South Africa and abroad. As a qualified tour guide he also offers bespoke private tours and experiences in and around the Mother City. Find him online at www.jaredincpt.com or www.instagram.com/jaredincpt.

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