

Bridging the skills shortage gap is key to the travel and tourism industry's post-pandemic recovery

 By [Enver Duminy](#)

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South Africa's travel and tourism industry is showing promising signs of bouncing back, with even more South Africans travelling domestically during the 2022 festive season. Cape Town Tourism's (CTT) 2022 Domestic Travel Intent report highlighted South Africa's growing appetite for travel this past December, pointing to an exceptionally positive outlook for the country's tourism industry, specifically Cape Town.



Enver Duminy, CEO, Cape Town Tourism

However, despite the industry's seemingly bright future, the sector continues to bear the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought this once-booming sector to a grinding halt in 2019. The pandemic essentially heightened existing skills gaps in the travel and tourism industry.

The root of SA's skills shortage

Although South Africa's 32,9% unemployment rate paints a bleak picture, a growing skills shortage exacerbates this high unemployment rate, causing a demand for more qualified candidates to fill the available posts that the industry cannot meet. This shortage is a barrier to entry for the numerous South Africans searching for employment daily and is why many jobs remain vacant.

PwC South Africa's Economic Outlook report says the country cannot count on future economic growth to solve this unskilled and semi-skilled unemployment problem and predicts the unemployment rate could reach 40% by 2030.

The report adds that the country's education system needs to produce more in-demand workers with the right skills. In addition, it says that South Africa needs a strong skills vision to improve employability, which will require the private and public sectors to focus on up-skilling its employees.

Working together to bridge the sector's skills shortage

South Africa's tourism industry has experienced significant growth and investment over recent years. This includes the first high-speed rail service on the continent and countless world-class tourist attractions, hotels and restaurants built in preparation for the 2010 Soccer World Cup.

However, the industry's extensive skills shortages prevent its return to pre-pandemic levels.

While increasing demand for domestic travel has the potential to accelerate the industry's recovery, the sector will continue to be hampered by staff shortages. As such, collaborative upskilling initiatives will be vital to ensuring the resilience and strength of the tourism industry.

The sector must support initiatives to close this skills gap through widespread access to knowledge-sharing platforms, resources, and public and private sector partnerships, like the CATHSSETA Sector Skills Plan (SSP). Over the next five years, the SSP intends to identify opportunities and platforms in the sectors within which meaningful skills development can take place.

The plan requires industry partners to support the sector's success, facilitate projected growth, and ensure access to skilled workers. In addition, the SSP highlights the need for upskilling, particularly among previously disadvantaged groups, to enable transformation in the sector.

It emphasises the need for sector players to invest more in succession planning to increase the retention rate of young employees through mentorship programmes. It also highlights the need for collaboration between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), TVET colleges and the industry to establish a pipeline to meet the supply and demand of skills in the sector.

In addition, there's a need for partnerships between the sector's organisations and the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) to offer more widespread career guidance initiatives, including career exhibitions, to help equip youth for careers in the sector.

There's no shortage of applications for roles in the travel and tourism industry – the problem is finding experienced candidates with the right skills. That's why a collaborative effort to upskill our unemployed workforce is crucial for the future of our country and the travel and tourism sector's recovery.

ABOUT ENVER DUMINY

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