

SA Tourism taps into Middle Eastern market, uplifts SMMEs at ATM Dubai

 By Robin Fredericks

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South Africa's tourism sector was hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic, with many businesses suffering and people losing their jobs. However, the country is determined to bounce back and is using international trade shows, such as the Arabian Travel Market (ATM), to help promote the country as a destination for international tourists.



Source: Supplied

The show, which runs from 1- 4 May at the Dubai World Trade Centre, in the UAE, has become the ultimate hub for the travel industry, featuring top destinations, cutting-edge travel technology providers, leading airlines, and giants in the hospitality industry.

We caught up with Nomasonto Ndlovu, South African Tourism's chief operations officer during the show to find out why participation in shows such as the ATM is important, how it is benefitting from this participation, and why tourism is a critical element for South Africa's economic recovery plan.

One of the main reasons why it is crucial for South Africa's tourism industry to participate in international trade shows, says Ndlovu, is to market the country and promote it as a tourist destination.

"This is particularly important for South Africa as the tourism industry is a significant contributor to the country's economy, generating over a million jobs in 2021. The sector has the potential to double this number, but it needs to recover from the effects of the pandemic first. By participating in events such as the ATM, South Africa can showcase its attractions, culture, and hospitality to the world and attract more tourists to the country."

Another critical reason why South Africa's tourism industry needs to participate in trade shows is to create jobs, says Ndlovu. "Tourism is not just about providing people with a holiday, it is also about job creation. When the country markets itself effectively, it attracts more tourists, which, in turn, creates more jobs. This is especially important for South Africa, where unemployment is high. By participating in international trade shows, South Africa can access new markets and

increase tourism in different regions of the country. This then creates more jobs and helps the country's economic recovery."

Last year, South African Tourism engaged in a [MoU with Emirates Airlines](#) as part of the ATM event. The agreement resulted in the airline operating 49 weekly flights to South Africa, indicating how South African Tourism is utilising international trade shows to its advantage, even during the pandemic.

This year, South African Tourism brought 19 exhibitors, comprising 14 products and experiences as well as five SMMEs to the show.

Trade show participation for SMMEs

Tourism SMMEs from South Africa often do not have the financial resources to attend shows such as the ATM, but by providing them with free stands, accommodation, and flights they can access new markets, says Ndlovu. "This not only gives SMMEs a chance to grow their businesses but also helps to build a more inclusive tourism industry in South Africa. The more SMMEs that participate in international trade shows, the more diverse and representative the industry becomes."



Source: Supplied | Nomasonto Ndlovu, COO, SA Tourism

Sonto Mbonambi, managing director of Nano Travel, expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to be at the event and emphasised how important market access is for their success, especially as top operators in their industry. "Attending events such as the ATM can be a valuable opportunity for businesses to network and create partnerships that lead to increased sales and growth."

For Nisreen Bulbulia, managing director of Discover Africa Travel, attending the ATM is a key market for her business. She prioritises it in her budget and considers it a vital opportunity to connect with clients from around the world in one place.

"SMMEs are a very critical part of our tourism offering. Through these businesses, we are able to showcase a wide range of tourism products and experiences that travellers are looking for. By having these SMMEs taking part in trade shows of this magnitude, we are able to fully show the world what our country has to offer as a business events and leisure destination," says Ndlovu.

Promoting SA to source markets

Commenting on how the ATM helps promote South Africa as a destination to source markets in Asia, Australia, and the Middle East, Ndlovu says international trade shows attract buyers from all over the world who are interested in doing business with South African tourism companies.

"By attending these events, South African businesses can network with buyers and sell their products and services to new markets. This drives the airlift and helps connect the world to South Africa.

"While the pandemic has been tough on the tourism industry, events such as the ATM provide an opportunity for the industry to bounce back and recover. By showcasing the country's attractions, culture, and hospitality to the world, South Africa can attract more tourists, create more jobs, and build a more inclusive and representative tourism industry."

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