



SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM

5 December 2016

Sisa will be conducting monthly webinars with Tourism Update, starting again in January 2017 – watch this space for details of dates and times.

A major theme that he will be covering in 2017 is Making a Case for Tourism, so that this sector and its impact on the economy is fully appreciated and understood. Sisa is excited about making tourism inclusive and relevant to every citizen of South Africa, and says: “We need to pull the entire industry behind this.”

He is eager to experience a cross-section of South Africa’s tourism establishments and offerings, and encourages members of the trade to get in touch to chat about site visits with other South African Tourism staff members. Please email CEO@southafrica.net with your suggestions.

Webinar: Questions for South African Tourism CEO Sisa Ntshona

1. Jacqui Taylor: I am the Executive Director of the National Association of Agritourism South Africa. The purpose of the association is to focus on rural tourism development. We have a number of emerging farmers and participants in route development. I would really appreciate if South African Tourism can support this NPO by highlighting the tourism offers to visitors. We need to get visitors into rural areas so we can support farming communities.

Hi Jacqui, and thanks for your question. It’s an important one, since stimulating and developing rural tourism is one of SA Tourism’s main focus areas in our bid to help spur prosperity and reduce unemployment and inequality. We are ramping up our efforts to expand the geographic spread of tourism beyond our most popular attractions, and spreading awareness about the wealth of diverse attractions our less-visited provinces and rural areas have to offer.

To achieve this, we’re working on collaborating more closely with local and provincial tourism authorities so that we can amplify their tourism offerings to targeted markets on the continent and around the world.

Here at SA Tourism we have a product team that takes media and tourism trade representatives on familiarisation trips to rural areas, so that they can sell South Africa as a travel destination offering authentic experience. Our efforts might not always focus on emerging farmers, but we do try to create awareness of culture, food, traditions and small

rural businesses (run by all ethnic groups). We are, after all, known as a “People’s Country” – often, our guests vote their interactions with local people as the highlight of their visit to SA.

Our international offices are also trying to tap into the demand for cultural experiences in South Africa. For example, our France office has been running a promotional campaign to promote regional tourism called “My Afrique du sud (plus the name of a province)” for the past six years. This year’s theme is: “My Afrique du sud Free State”.

Organisations such as Open Africa work closely with small businesses to establish tourism routes. These are authentic experiences that generate income and create jobs for local people. They are the experts – even the World Bank has recognised their efforts to drive development in rural areas. You can get in touch with them directly by visiting their website: <http://www.openafrica.org/>

You can also get in touch with Bjorn Hufkie at the South Africa National Convention Bureau (SANCB), by emailing bjorn@southafrica.net or calling him at (011) 895-3097, to talk about route development with the regional and international business traveller in mind. Perhaps you could also consider taking part in the SANCB’s Meetings Africa trade exhibition at the end of February to discuss issues related to NPOs and explore avenues to promote your route.

Wishing you all the best and please keep us informed about your initiatives.

2. Dewald Alberts: What are we going to do to create cohesive strategies or backbones with ribs in outlying areas like the Karoo/Kalahari regions, where there are many ventures but the distances are vast in between?

Answer:

Hi Dewald, you raise a very valid point. The Karoo and Kalahari hold vast potential for tourism, but distance will always be a consideration for travellers – including the distance and travelling time from the major centres. But we believe that if rural or remote tourism experiences are packaged correctly with other attractions in close proximity, such offerings could fly.

In fact, South African Tourism has just hosted about 20 trade representatives in the Karoo from 29 November to 1 December 2016?, to help them formulate, promote and sell travel packages for the region.

We worked closely with the Great Karoo Tourism office on an itinerary and consulted with tour operators to facilitate the tour. The tourism office can also use the Deals Dashboard (which highlights special accommodation offers and experiences) to promote attractions on Shotleft.co.za, South African Tourism’s dedicated website that encourages South Africans to take short trips in their own country.

Another service we offer is Speed Marketing sessions, where tourism products in a specific area get the opportunity to present their offerings to tour operators for consideration in their packages. This might be something that businesses in the Karoo/Kalahari regions could consider – please ask them to get in touch with our speed marketing specialist, Noluthando Mazibuko, at noluthando@southafrica.net or (011) 895-3138 to find out more.

- 3. Andrew Sherwood: Hello Sisa. Congratulations on your appointment as CEO of SA Tourism. I represent a proudly local publishing house with a focus on travel and tourism - we are Cape based but would like to work closer with your office ... Who would be best to speak to besides yourself? Obviously, would be great to introduce what we do, to you directly. Look forward to hearing from you. Yours in growing the tourism sector!**

Hi Andrew. Thank you for your good wishes and for helping to promote and showcase our beautiful country through your publications. We value your support and would love to nurture a closer relationship. I suggest that you get in touch with our communications team at our head office for a chat - please email our Communications Manager, Thandiwe Mathibela, at thandiwe@southafrica.net or (011) 895-3177.

- 4. Jacqui Taylor: I recently worked on a project to turn Matjhabeng (Free State) into a tourism destination because many miners have been laid off. The problem is that the mines have left that area in a mess, so it is very difficult to have a marketing plan to turn this area into a tourism area. Who is going to take on the mining companies - there are blocks of bricks, concrete, empty shafts everywhere.**

Hi again Jacqui. It is extremely disheartening to hear about the situation the Matjhabeng area finds itself in – desperate to boost tourism but being hamstrung by factors beyond its control. I would suggest that you talk to the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) about the mining situation, and then work with your provincial tourism authority to put together a compelling tourism offering for this region. You can get in touch with the Free State DMR office by calling (057) 391 1300, or by emailing Ndlelenhle.Zindela@dmr.gov.za or Tshepo.Makgoba@dmr.gov.za. Contact the Free State tourism authority at (051) 409 9900 or info@freestatetourism.org.

Our research indicates that most tourists are not attracted to a single product but a rather a combination of a variety of compelling tourism offerings, and perhaps this would be a viable option for Matjhabeng. Please also get in touch with an organisation called Open Africa to chat about developing tourism routes in the area – here's their website: <http://www.openafrica.org/>.

- 5. Derek Martin: In terms of talent retention in South Africa, what can be done? All talent is looking to move overseas, leaving a massive void in South Africa.**

Hi Derek. Talent retention is a broader macroeconomic issue, but from a tourism perspective, we certainly don't want to see our finest and most talented industry players being lost to other countries – especially since we are concentrating on boosting tourism's contribution to the economy and we need our best people here to help us do it.

But we do need to provide incentives for them to stay and contribute to our economy and our national development, like providing decent jobs for them and opportunities for growth.

One way to create jobs is by showcasing and promoting the sectors that have been identified by the government as having high potential for growth, by attracting and hosting important international business events here.

By way of example, SA hosted the International Aids Conference in Durban a few months ago. Apart from the 18 000 delegates who attended the conference, Durban also secured two international research facilities that will be based in the city.

So this conference not only boosted the economy and put South Africans to work in catering for, transporting and hosting the delegates, but the knowledge transfer and new infrastructure development will benefit South Africans in the health sector and generally. Furthermore, I am also open to suggestions that will aid in the above.

6. **Sharon Gilbert-Rivett: How is SA Tourism going to be supporting sustainable tourism development across the board, both in terms of the promotion of sustainable tourism businesses (and inclusion of them in its marketing) to engage with sustainable tourism organisations such as Fair Trade Tourism? Sustainable tourism is key to the industry's growth and the fair spread of its benefits.**

Hello Sharon, thanks so much for your question. You are quite correct in saying sustainable tourism is essential to the growth of the tourism sector and the equitable spread of its benefits. South African Tourism is a firm supporter of sustainable, eco-friendly and green tourism in the country. We fully endorse the fair trade (FT) principle in South Africa - specifically refined for a developing country – that people, the community and the environment all matter.

We cannot just look at “green” and not at how we treat our staff, where and how do we procure (stimulating the secondary economy, and so on) and uplift communities.

To this end, we’ve had global joint marketing agreements (JMAs) with Fair Trade Tourism South Africa, aimed specifically at the countries where the demand for fair trade tourism experiences is high – e.g. Scandinavia and Europe. We’ve also conducted bespoke FT speed marketing sessions at our annual trade show, INDABA, and have encouraged our country offices to package FT products and have incorporated them into the familiarisation trips we host for travel media and travel agents’ guests.

You’ll be pleased to hear that the Tourism Grading Council of SA, a business unit of South African Tourism, is starting to meet the need for sustainable tourism offerings. Our grading criteria already take into account responsible tourism and accommodation establishments gain extra points towards their star grading when they meet these criteria. But we are looking into doing even more by partnering with the National Department of Tourism and

implementing South Africa Bureau of Standards and South African National Standards responsible tourism criteria, and rewarding establishments for practising responsible tourism.

Incidentally, our annual business events trade exhibition, Meetings Africa, has won the best Green Exhibition Award from the Exhibition Association for Southern Africa for the past four years. It is extremely important for us to empower the tourism industry to host sustainable business events in our country, and so the theme of the next Meetings Africa expo is Sustainability: Advancing Africa Together Responsibly. We realised that we needed to take the lead and set an example for the industry when it comes to sustainability and greening, to reduce the impact tourism has on our environment.

This year we signed our first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Event Greening Forum (EGF), to help make the business events industry more sustainable.

We also took members of the Australian Society of Travel Writers to a township recently to witness a local charity at work. But this is just a drop in the ocean and we do realise that we still have a high mountain to climb to create awareness of sustainable tourism.

Please get in touch with our Global Manager: Product, Neesha Pillay, at neesha@southafrica.net or (011) 895-3064, so we can discuss future partnerships and initiatives. We looking forward to working with you again.

7. Karen Donkin: Hi there, I agree with Zephne's query, re. Marketing assistance to promote travel within SA (for South Africans) and travel to SA (from overseas). Emails / telephone calls with SAT currently aren't being answered.

Hi Karen. I am sorry to hear that your calls to our offices go unanswered, and will take steps to rectify this.

Much of the marketing work that we do is informed by research and insights, which we publish on our website for anyone to access. Please visit our website on www.southafrica.net/research to view the reports that are available.

We are ramping up our efforts to share our data with members of the industry to help them promote domestic and international travel to South Africa.

Please also feel free to get in touch with the head of our domestic team, Debbie Damant, on debbie@southafrica.net or (011) 895-3029, and contact the head of our brand advertising team, Ian Utermohlen, on ian@southafrica.net or (011) 895-3184. They will be able to guide you in the areas in which you need assistance.

Please keep us posted on your progress – I will be hosting monthly webinars through this forum and would love to get your feedback.

- 8. Paul Tully: I'm in sales & marketing for Captured in Africa, a safari operator based in Joburg - our team and I are also heavily involved in conservation issues, particularly with big cats. One of the key areas I would love to focus on is responsible tourism, appreciating local people and wildlife. An issue we see is tourists being put off travelling to SA based on the current exploitation of lions in captivity, cub petting. I'm sure you'd agree we should stop anything which reflects badly on Brand SA. So we would be keen to talk further on the responsible tourism industry with a view to discourage certain practices concerning wildlife in captivity. Your thoughts?**

Hi Paul. Thanks for raising this point – it is extremely relevant and topical at the moment, and gives us an opportunity to unequivocally state our position. South African Tourism does not promote or endorse any interaction with wild animals such as the petting of wild cats, interacting with elephants and walking with lions, cheetahs and so on.

Our marketing efforts promote an authentic and credible tourism experience to all our tourists, and this includes an authentic wildlife experience to keep it as “wild” and natural as possible.

But we take these concerns extremely seriously and are talking to the Sustainable Tourism Partnership Programme to see how we can work more closely with them to eradicate such practices.

- 9. Cathy Oosterwyk: My question is around SMMEs. I have noticed in many ventures, if you are not a member of the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (SATSA), then the SMME is excluded from many projects. It is expensive to join and the criteria are not reasonable for an SMME, especially now that Tourism Enterprise Partnership (TEP) assistance is no longer available.**

Hi Cathy, many thanks for your question. Promoting small business is a subject I am very passionate about as much of my background has been in SMME banking and small enterprise development. South Africa has one of the widest income inequality gaps in the world and, even after 22 years of democracy, a huge section of the population is still excluded from participating in the economy. High unemployment, particularly among the youth, is rife and poses a major risk for our country. I believe that one way to spark the economy is by creating an enabling environment for small businesses to thrive.

The demands of a modern organisation in South Africa go far beyond just making a profit or fulfilling an objective. We have to be awake to the environment that we operate in. That's why SA Tourism is constantly exploring ways to help support, promote and showcase SMMEs. In this spirit, SMME development – particularly targeting black, youth and women-owned and -operated organisations - will now form part of our supply chain deliverables. This won't compromise standards but will help us find new, better and more efficient ways of doing things.

TEP has certainly left a gap; however, I do believe an SA Tourism-led and industry-supported SMME/enterprise development initiative may be appropriate to ensure we create space for new entrants.

We do a lot of work with SATSA members but please feel free to get in touch with us directly to discuss if and how we can work with your SMME. Our Welcome campaign generates research and insights to give SMMEs relevant information to cater to the tourist markets that visit SA, and uses workshops and online platforms to educate the trade on packaging and marketing to new markets, so there are still several ways in which your small business can benefit without being a member of any association. Thank you for contributing to the sector and please carry on flying the SA flag high!

10. Adri van der Merwe: How will SA Tourism invest in international marketing activities and who are the identified key markets?"

Hi Adri. Our strategy for investing in international marketing is a very simple one, heavily influenced by research into where our activities will deliver the best return on investment on a restricted budget. We have recently refreshed our strategy to focus on prioritised markets across the globe and in Africa, and our marketing budget will be divided up accordingly. The formula we use looks at the potential size of the holiday and business segment and we invest accordingly.

Certain European markets such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France and the Netherlands remain high on our priority list, as is the United States and Australasia, but we will be focusing more on Asian markets as there is a strong uptick in outbound travel from that area at the moment – the number of Chinese travellers visiting South Africa jumped a massive 66% between August last year and August this year, for example.

11. Martin Hatchuel: I represent Knysna & Partners, the local destination management and marketing organisation. How are we making sure that new products are compatible with what the market requires? Are we doing enough at local level to make players aware of the need for destination management before we begin with destination marketing? How are we making sure that the players understand the need for making the destination market ready? This goes to the innovation point you're making.

Hello Martin, and thanks for your question. This also speaks to the high-level research we are constantly conducting into what the market needs and wants, and what the perceptions are out there. We are also beefing up our in-house research and analytics capability to deliver better, more targeted data and insights to help the industry. This will be available on an open-source basis on our platforms, and an announcement to this effect will be made soon.

We regularly conduct insights workshops with a view to making tourism products market-ready. For instance, we met in September with regional tourism organisations in the Western

Cape (including Knysna) to make them aware of the platforms that are available, particularly the insights workshops, which will help them to market and cater to our core and investment markets.

We also met with SANParks in November to look at doing insights workshops for all SANParks routes between George and Knysna. We are pulling out the stops to gather more relevant information about traveller behaviour and trends, and share it with partners such as yourselves, to, as you correctly say, ensure that new products are compatible with what the market requires. As always, I am open to receiving advice and guidance in this regard.

12. Amy Knight-Dawson: Please can you advise how you intend to communicate SAT's marketing activities, agendas and per sector, whom our relevant contacts at SAT are (both in market and also here at home in SA).

Hi Amy. There was a recent Ministerial Review of South African Tourism, and one of the aspects that emerged is that we have to make a concerted effort to work more closely with the tourism industry. We need to get better at informing them about how and where we are investing our marketing budget, and listen closely to the feedback we get from them.

We are in the process of reviewing our portfolio, which is about determining which markets we will focus on to try and get the most number of tourists coming to South Africa. Our goal is to increase the number of tourists travelling to and in SA by 5 million in the next 5 years. So we are busy determining where our primary and secondary marketing investments should be, as part of this strategy.

This process has been informed by research but also thanks to interaction with members of the trade, the private sector, provincial and city tourism bodies and so on. We're also working more closely with the Department of International Affairs and Co-operation so that, through our embassies around the world, we can widen our communication efforts and stretch our marketing budgets further.

13. Tony Romer-Lee: Welcome Sisa! Great initiative to do a webinar... Does SAT plan to change the strapline "Inspiring New Ways" to something far more appealing to overseas tourists?

Thanks for your kind wishes, Tony. The "Inspiring New Ways" is a country (SA Inc) strapline that has a strong premise behind it: we believe that once visitors experience the diversity, possibilities and ubuntu inherent in our people, place and culture, enriching memories and life-changing experiences will be created. This is why we are intent on inspiring new and different ways to make a visit to or in South Africa a truly memorable "break".

We are also in the process of rolling out our new global marketing campaign, "South Africa – a wow in every moment". It builds on the successful "Meet South Africa" campaign, which has been running for the past four years.

The new creative approach comes as SA Tourism has undergone a stringent strategic process where we challenged, reviewed and checked everything we do against our strategic intent as an organisation. In line with the Tourism Growth Strategy, our ultimate goal is grow our tourism market by 5 million trips over the next 5 years, and to do that we needed to really focus our marketing efforts into a single-minded message. Our new campaign is designed to both create desire for our destination and to overcome barriers.

The “wow in every moment” comes from the insight that South Africa offers many diverse experiences in close proximity and this is something we will be demonstrating in all our communication from now on.

14. Susanna Hagen: Austrian tour operators report a 19.2% increase for the first six months of this year. However, operators, agents and publications but also the public have to negotiate many hurdles to communicate or get information. SA Tourism's representation in Germany is not responsible for Austria. How can you address this issue?"

Hi Susanna. SA Tourism is thrilled about the promising increase in visitors from the Austrian market, and we hope to further build on those numbers. Austria is classified as one of our “watch-list” markets, which show potential to grow into more prominent source markets in the future. We currently service these markets from our Head Office, in partnership with stakeholders such as embassies and SAA, and have managed to accomplish a lot with limited funding despite the rand-euro exchange rate.

We recently held a trade roadshow in Austria and Switzerland aimed at creating market access for SMMEs under the SIPPO (Swiss Import Promotion Programme).

Something else we are constantly working on is hosting media here, especially during our low season, to encourage positive editorial coverage. This, we hope, will help influence Austrian consumers to consider South Africa as a destination – bearing in mind that editorial coverage is considered more credible than advertising.

We also educate the trade through various platforms, and we're currently undertaking a global trade research study, and will consider the trends that emerge to help us better partner with trade in a mutually beneficial way.

But certainly, given the healthy growth in arrivals from Austria, more dedication and effort will be given to this market from our Head Office. Please get in touch with us so we can discuss partnering with you to grow arrivals and spend further – you can contact Dinky Malikane at dinky@southafrica.net or (011) 895-3068.

15. Derek Martin: I have been living in Australia for the last two years and I have just returned to South Africa. The perceived reputation of South Africa is very poor overseas and I found myself defending South Africa as a country every day, telling

people that South Africa is safe and a great tourism destination. What can be done to reduce this negative connotation when targeting international tourism?

Hi Derek, welcome back home – great to have you back in South Africa. I agree with you that perceptions of South Africa are still generally poor and this is one of our biggest challenges as an organisation. We found in our research that when people don't know enough about who we are and what we offer, they are less motivated to travel. At the same time, this lack of motivation is compounded by concerns around safety, security and perceived lack of value.

Our strategy is focused on creating desire for who we are and building confidence by removing the barriers that are getting in the way. Government and the private sector must provide access to information that excites people about our country and dispels concerns. Once travellers visit us, they realise just what an amazing country South Africa is. Some of the ways in which we can spread a positive message is via social media and word of mouth to overcome negativity and concerns for personal safety.

Australia is one of our core markets, meaning that a lot of investment and effort goes into marketing South Africa there. We regularly host Australian travel agents, travel media, decision makers, celebrities and public figures with huge followings to make them aware of the real situation in SA: that our cities are as safe as any other big city in the world. As is the case in most major cities, a tourist in South Africa needs to not attract criminal elements by being street-wise, not flashing any money or jewellery in public, and generally being aware of their surroundings.

I also want to target South African expatriates working and living around the world, to engage them and update them with regular information so they become SA Tourism ambassadors in their temporary countries of residence. Word of mouth is still more powerful than any form of marketing we invest in – perhaps a bi-annual in-country authentic SA braai experience could do the trick 😊?

16. Dewald Alberts: I feel that currently tourists are actually being ripped off by unrealistic promises via packages sold overseas and hence rushed-through itineraries. They do not get time to experience on-the-ground local people and our heritage for one is neglected; also, the origins of mankind are low on the list of possible attractions. Do we perhaps suffer from excessive “red tape” in all of SA tourism?

Hi again Dewald. I agree that unscrupulous operators can seriously damage our country's reputation as a tourism destination. It's a serious cause for concern. That's why we insist on integrity and value for money in our interactions with the trade, and blacklist those players who are not living up to that ethos.

SA Tourism takes part in several roadshows, events and seminars, both in South Africa and abroad, to educate the industry (tour operators included) on what South Africa has to offer, so that our country can be properly represented when being sold. Our discussions with

tourism authorities have included alerting tour operators to the fact that itineraries are too busy and leave too little time to enjoy the country's attractions.

We are also setting up a dedicated unit to focus on tourist experience because, as you have rightly pointed out, the marketing brand promise that we make has to be completed by the actual experience. We're looking into a wider form of quality assurance that goes beyond establishment grading.

As a research-driven organisation, we have noted from our insights that many tourists want to experience South Africa's culture and heritage offerings. This is increasingly being incorporated in all our marketing communication to trade and consumers alike – including in our new "A wow in every moment" marketing campaign. Such authentic South African experiences are also included in all the familiarisation trips we host for media and trade.

17. Martin Hatchuel: What are your thoughts on niche marketing? How are we going to access, for example, cyclists? Is it done through advertising alone? What is SA Tourism's approach?

Hi Martin. Niche markets can generate a great return on investment if you use the right platforms and have the right tourism products. Recently I have been approached regarding cultural tourism, sport tourism, medical tourism and even marine tourism as part of the bigger national ocean economy drive known as Operation Phakisa, to unlock the economic potential of South Africa's oceans.

We assess in our annual research the interest each market has in our various niche offerings such as golf and cycling, and market accordingly. As examples, SA Tourism's Australia-New Zealand country office has sent media to participate and cover the Sani2C and sent celebrities to film from the Extreme 19th for the Golf Show.

We also have a Chalo South Africa platform – similar to Sho't Left – that is free for use by Indian outbound operators that sell South Africa. One of the big pushes for 2017/18 is going to be to encourage travel agencies to load niche packages as well as their standard SA packages, at no cost to them. This will give us an idea of the level of interest in niche activities.

The Tourism Grading Council is looking at providing graded clients with accolades in niche areas. For example, if a property offers a specialised focus on cycling, then they would be advertised as such on the TGCSA website. This way, the tourist not only gets the benefit of staying in a quality-assured establishment but can stay where their interest is being catered for.

Our hosting unit offers a couple of proactive specialised itineraries, whereby travel media in particular are invited to explore certain niche markets, such as LGBTI, safari and spa, golf, adventure experiences, food and wine, luxury travel, train journeys, culture tours and highlights of a certain province.

Although it's a niche activity, cycling features in our brand communications as the activity helps us demonstrate safety and security in South Africa. One of our brand pillars is active

adventure, and cycling is featured in our content and advertising. We are extremely grateful for all the hard work done by the Cape Town Cycle Tour Trust in developing the cycle tour into the largest timed cycling event in the world. The Absa Cape Epic is the biggest full-service mountain bike stage race in the world and both these races are amplified on our local and digital platforms.

18. Ryan Powell: Tourism is repeatedly highlighted as a key driver of growth and an employment creator, amongst others. Part of SA Tourism's role is that of demand creation. What, therefore, is the role being played by SA Tourism in the reduction of the regulatory hurdles which inhibit this growth - like the providing the clarity we need on the unabridged birth certificates and reducing visa hurdles that keep people from visiting?

Hi Ryan. You're quite right – red tape can certainly be a barrier to tourism, and we need to make it as easy and pleasant as possible for people to visit South Africa.

The National Department of Tourism is working with Home Affairs to help travellers obtain the required travel documents and capture biometric data seamlessly and effectively. It's a complex issue as it's not just about boosting tourism numbers but about the welfare of our children, as the visa regulations were initially introduced to curb child trafficking.

If we can tackle the efficiency of the processes and target communication strategies around these requirements, I am sure these hurdles can be overcome.

19. Chris Alexandre: Hello, can I ask what plans there are to revive the existing tourism grading process and mechanism for SA properties, and to provide more value to the graded members?

Hello Chris, thanks for your question – this is something the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) has been working on quite extensively. As you are probably aware, by awarding star gradings to establishments, we effectively give them a stamp of quality assurance, letting visitors know that they can expect certain minimum standards of service and value for money.

The team at TGCSA has been doing a lot behind the scenes to restore the reputation of grading and provide added value to graded establishments. They have put in considerable effort and among the new initiatives are:

- a. Revamping the TGCSA website to make it more user friendly and easy to navigate.
- b. Reviewing grading criteria, which they do every three years, to stay relevant in this ever-changing industry and make sure standard reflect those in the rest of the world.
- c. Implementing a “basket of benefits” to provide establishments with an extensive range of offerings to help them in the day-to-day running of their

businesses, from purchasing linen to training staff or drafting legal documents. All graded properties have access to this amazing tool.

- d. Sending out an electronic newsletter to inform and educate clients about grading and also provide tips and nuggets about the tourism industry.
- e. Conducting post-assessment audits to make sure that TGCSA assessors are indeed assessing properties correctly and that the client is being looked after.

20. Anton Thompson: I would like to know what statistics are available on the spend of tourists in this country. What do we have and where can I access it? I am interested in coming up with a suggestion of where and how our marketing money should be spent, to do this I need figures. Do you have them?

Hi Anton. We have a treasure trove of statistics available to the public on our website – please visit <http://www.southafrica.net/research/en/landing/research-home>.

It would be great to hear your thoughts once you've looked at the data in these research reports.

As a destination marketing organisation, SA Tourism has to market the country as a tourism destination on a very limited budget. This compels us to adopt targeted strategies that maximise our returns on investment.

We are currently finalising our new marketing investment framework and have been consulting with the tourism industry and partners to determine where and how to invest, because we strongly believe in partnerships and collaborative efforts so that we can then achieve our common shared goal of inclusive growth.

1. Daniel Adidwa: You have smaller providers who can give you great context on how to make tourism more equitable, however most can't afford association fees and thus are not likely to participate in key discussions. What platform will you use to engage with smaller enterprises that can't afford to be at the association meetings?

Hi Daniel, you raise an important point. We do a fair amount of engagement with SMMEs through road shows and other means. As an example, our Provincial Master Assessors travel throughout South Africa to visit small guesthouses and B&B properties in lesser-known corners of our country. But we will certainly be redoubling our efforts to get more small businesses participating in the tourism economy.

We have also just recently entered into a partnership with SATSA where we will be calling on SMMEs to submit their entries to be considered for a market access programme that will culminate in them being given an opportunity to exhibit at our INDABA trade show. But we have heard the voice of smaller providers and will also be working with provinces to ensure that this is not only limited to SMMEs affiliated with SATSA.

We are also exploring ways to develop incubation programmes for SMMEs to enable them to become members of business events industry associations.

21. Rob Hetem: Good afternoon, congratulations on your appointment Sisa. I look forward to a deeper collaboration between SA Tourism and the private sector in developing opportunities outside the traditionally well established markets. This is definitely not only about financial investment so the message I'd like to hear from SA Tourism is their strategic support for the good work which is already being done by the private sector in so many markets. In line with that I'd like to say a quick thank you to the members of your team (and especially Sadiq) for their assistance in supporting a number of stakeholders in the Middle East. Bottom line we need you to take the lead in encouraging open discussion and collaboration to leverage the efforts and spend from all sectors

Good day, Rob, and thank you for the positive message and for acknowledging the valuable work that our hard-working team members are doing here at South African Tourism.

There will certainly be far more engagement and partnerships with the private sector going forward – in fact, this is critical if we want the tourism sector to flourish. SA Tourism can't do what we do effectively if we don't have the bedrock of excellent tourism businesses, establishments and products to build our marketing efforts on. You are the backbone of our industry and we salute you!

Our team is also currently working on a project for South East Asia that involves the private sector, and we will share more details in the next few months.

I look forward to many fruitful and mutually beneficial collaborations with all our stakeholders. Please feel free to send me any suggestions you may have in this regard – CEO@southafrica.net

22. Johann Barnard: How can SA Tourism improve destination knowledge to our international agents? Ebola had a huge impact the last two years and if tourists were better informed they would have still travelled to SA. Most tourists still think that Africa is one country.

Hi Johann, you're quite correct – the perception is still that if one African country sneezes, the rest of us catch a cold. The Ebola epidemic took place far away from us, in West Africa, but it definitely affected international visitor numbers to South Africa and we're only now starting to recover.

One of the most effective ways we can improve knowledge about our destination is by broadening our network of where we share information on South Africa, both domestically and internationally. We are working with the likes of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) and DIRCO (what used to be known as Foreign Affairs) so that we can also use our country's embassies to share our messages and information, including dispelling perceptions such as those that existed around Ebola.

We are also going to focus more on sharing our work and research with the greater tourism industry in South Africa, so that they can also share it on their platforms as well. At our country offices, a considerable amount of effort goes into educating international travel media and trade about South Africa, through roadshows and trade shows, as well as ongoing marketing and communications campaigns. We also often bring media and trade representatives to South Africa so they can experience the country for themselves and also spread the (hopefully positive) word once they get home.

23. Stefan Gennrich: Stefan Gennrich, SA Golf and Leisure Vacations, on educating SA youth wishing to enter the tourism industry: Besides existing college courses, is SA Tourism engaging youth to be informed about job and business opportunities if they want to enter this industry? Are you planning such courses to present to youth at community and grass roots levels to contribute to growing SMME entry and thereby to become positive contributors to develop sustainable 'community tourism' product for our country?

Hi Stefan, and thanks for your question. The youth make up the largest proportion of our unemployed population and we are extremely concerned that not enough is being done to promote tourism and its related industries as viable career options, at school level and elsewhere, especially in the light of tourism's current and potential contribution to the economy.

To try and rectify this, every year the National Department of Tourism hosts a National Tourism Careers Expo, with other government entities and sector education and training authorities. The event provides an opportunity for tourism curriculum experts to share information with tourism educators, and for stakeholders within the sector to share information on the careers that are available.

It is a wonderful showcase of the wide possibilities available to learners and aims to drive the National Tourism Strategy's goal of creating 225 000 tourism job opportunities by 2020. It's entirely possible, and our vibrant young go-getting young people have an important role to play as tourism ambassadors and potential industry players.

The NDT also has other projects that address community development and these include:

- The Social Responsibility Implementation Programme, which is an Expanded Public Works Programme of the National Department of Tourism. This is a targeted grant aimed at supporting the development of community based tourism, thereby stimulating job creation, the transformation of the sector, economic empowerment, community benefit and the geographic spread of tourism investment.
- The National Youth Chefs Training Programme was created in partnership with the South African Chefs Association to address the urgent need for cooks and chefs in South Africa's growing hospitality industry. Young,

unemployed people are targeted who have the interest and drive to work as chefs in the hospitality industry.

So yes, there are some tourism-related projects that target community development and youth empowerment but we are all too aware that these are not enough.

I would like to encourage the private sector to create more internship and job shadowing opportunities for our young (and particularly previously disadvantaged) people so that together, we can achieve the inclusive growth of the sector.

24. Mark de Villiers: From Amazing Africa. What influence would or could you have at the 'front door' to South Africa....our Customs Department. We have had several incidents where tourists coming into South Africa have had unpleasant experiences from customs officials not helping or being helpful, rude, etc. and spoiling their first impression of SA. Thanks.

Hi Mark, you raise a valid and common concern. Soon we will be deploying an executive to look specifically at the tourist experience from all ends of the spectrum, to ensure everyone executes their job using a tourism lens – in other words, making the customer/traveller experience as easy, pleasant and hassle-free as possible.

When we were preparing for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, we worked closely with the Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA) on immigration and customs issues. We had an opportunity to educate the airport staff on the importance of tourism and being welcoming to tourists, and we had good results. We are now revisiting this and are working with ACSA currently to develop training interventions to improve visitor experience at the airport.

We are also in constant conversation with the Department of Home Affairs to determine how we can best work with each other and improve the experience that tourists have at customs.

25. Jennifer Beattie: Visas are a huge issue for travellers from Africa - Africa travellers are last minute travellers and we lose out to countries like Dubai due to quick visa turn around- how is SAT going to assist with resolving these issues with government? West Africa/Nigeria is a good example.

Hi Jennifer. South African Tourism has been actively involved in raising the immigration regulation concerns in West Africa and highlighting the negative impact it will have on increasing tourist arrivals out of Nigeria.

In Nigeria, South African Tourism is part of a South African stakeholders' forum which includes DIRCO through the embassy, Home Affairs officials at the embassy and SAA West Africa. We hold quarterly meetings to assess progress, identify gaps and raise concerns.

We also have a good relationship with the trade associations, where they are able to raise their concerns. Through these platforms we have been able to influence some of the decisions at country level while we wait for Home Affairs to implement amended regulations.

These include reducing visa processing times from 14 working days to 6 days, allowing a proxy to submit visa applications on behalf of groups of more than 10 people, and encouraging the issuing of long-term visas for regular travellers, which will reduce pressure on home affairs officials.

Another area of concern is that we have had reports of African travellers being mistreated at the port of entry at OR Tambo International Airport, which the West African stakeholders' forum is looking into.

The African Union is also spearheading the idea of visa-free travel by Africans within Africa, enabling free movement between countries, which it hopes to see in place by 2020.

26. Virendra Dhar: Dear Sir, I am Virendra Dhar from Travcare Holidays DMC based in Joburg. Our major market is India & our clients from India have been facing inordinate delays in obtaining visas especially during peak months (for India) like May / June / July. Also sir, some airlines continue to ask for original birth certificates from travellers for their children.

Dear Virendra, thank you for raising your concerns. This is one of the biggest challenges our tourism economy is facing at the moment, but a lot of work is happening behind the scenes to address this and we are working with both the Department of Home Affairs and the High Commission in India to address these issues.

- a. **As the publisher of leading travel trade and consumer magazines in Austria we are facing a wall whenever we want to feature South Africa. We run regular B2B-specials on Africa and a yearly publication on Africa for consumers and trade in which we manage to cooperate with most countries in Southern Africa. With SA Tourism it has been a long and complicated procedure with lots of detours (embassy visits, offers via the Swiss advertising agent and the German PR agency...) and no outcome. How can we cooperate professionally in future?**
- b. **My personal focus as travel journalist is on responsible tourism on which I report in various magazines regularly. Is there an opportunity for a press trip/hosted visit featuring some of the projects South Africa has been developing? Maybe as a post-tour to Indaba 2017?**

Hi, thank you so much for getting in touch and for your ongoing efforts to profile South Africa's tourism offerings.

We are sorry to hear about your difficulties in accessing the right people at SA Tourism and will try our level best to accommodate your concerns and requests. Please email our communications team on mediaq@southafrica.net or (011) 895-3105 – they will be happy to chat with you to explore any opportunities in this regard.

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