

Tourism the golden ticket to job creation

By  Andrew Stark

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In a country where over six million people are unemployed, it is no wonder that job creation has been the hot topic.



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In his State of the Nation address, President Cyril Ramaphosa's said there was "no reason" why a lofty goal of achieving 1.4m direct tourism jobs could not be realised - double the number of jobs currently supported by South Africa's tourism sector. Meanwhile, South Africa's National Tourism Sector Strategy has as a goal, achieving a target of supporting one million direct jobs by 2026.

To tackle unemployment, poverty and inequality, South Africa is employing a strategy of "inclusive tourism growth", says Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom. According to Stats SA, one in 23 people in South Africa is employed in the tourism sector. Minister, we agree it should be a great deal more.

As a labour-intensive sector, tourism has the potential not only to create jobs, but also to promote entrepreneurship, gender equality and the upskilling South Africa's youth. With an extensive value chain, the success of tourism spills over to many other industries and stakeholders. As an illustration of this, just from a job creation standpoint, tourism's employment contribution, including jobs indirectly supported by the sector, already exceeds 1.6 million.



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Investing in tourism as a job creator is one of the small changes South Africa's economy needs to help it start moving again, but it will require a whole-of-government approach, combined with the willingness of private sector, to remove barriers, support emerging tourism business and encourage the behaviour of travel among all South Africans.

Job creation and career development in the tourism and travel sectors are a key focus for the Flight Centre Travel Group. We believe in uplifting the skills and employability of people within the tourism and travel sectors and this accreditation shows how seriously we take the role.

We train over 250 South Africans on average, every year – mostly female. Many of our staff also go on to fulfil their brightness of future in other tourism and travel roles. Some even open their own business through our independent consultant model, and others go on to create their own jobs.

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While other sectors grapple with the impact of technology and innovation on job creation, the tourism and travel sector, by its very nature, requires a high level of human interaction, even if the roles have to change because of technology, e.g. the evolution of travel agent to travel expert.

In fact, one could argue that technology has made travel agents even more valuable because, in an online world, travellers are so much more overwhelmed with choice. Since you can't "test drive" travel, that's where someone who knows what they're doing – a travel expert – can provide true value. DIY travel done wrong can cost you a great deal.

In the travel sector, we've experienced first-hand how technology has changed and enhanced our role, and how many new employment opportunities and careers have arisen as a result.



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That said, our industry needs to continue to future-proof itself to ensure we are upskilling employees with the appropriate industry experience and fostering talent in areas in which the tourism and travel sector is evolving. That means empowering the future tourism employee to think critically and creatively, leverage technology and focus on personalisation, which is where we see future travel demand going.

It also entails employing like-minded skilled travel professionals who reflect our new customers and inspire and make it easier for new travellers, who may not have had an opportunity to experience the joy of travel yet, to travel with peace of mind.

This is important because travel opens the mind and appetite to see the world through a different lens. And the more people we can inspire to travel, the more people we can employ to guide those travels.

In the words of South African Tourism CEO Sisa Ntshona: "Let's all get involved in this growing sector, which is good for GDP growth, labour creation and the economy in general."

ABOUT ANDREW STARK

Andrew Stark is the managing director: MEA for Flight Centre Travel Group.

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