

# To advance youth in tourism, we need to advance new skills

By [Tim Smith](#)

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We applaud the efforts of Youth in Tourism month and the initiatives of the national Department of Tourism and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) to prioritise the advancement of youth in tourism, writes Tim Smith, but South Africa needs to make sure they have the right skills to forge a career in the sector.



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Travel and tourism make up one of the world's largest economic sectors, driving job creation and economic growth. The latest research from World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) on South Africa shows travel and tourism generated 716,500 jobs directly in 2016 (4.6% of total employment) and this is forecast to grow by 3.6% in 2017 to 742,000. By 2027, travel and tourism is forecast to support 2,459,000 jobs (13.2% of total employment), an increase of 4.2% p/a over the period.

*“ There are opportunities for young South Africans in the travel and tourism industry, but we need to ensure they have the skills to march into the future with confidence. ”*

## Hotel and hospitality courses are good, but...

Unfortunately, there is a disconnect when it comes preparing hotel and hospitality students for the realities the career demands. The feedback I get from graduates and interns is that the courses are good, but are trying to cover too much ground without delivering enough depth of content.

Another issue is the management of the expectations of those students. Once more there is a large disconnect in terms of expectations and deliverables. Students think a degree will set them on an automatic course to management. In reality, a degree may speed up that path, but graduates still have to serve an 'apprenticeship', like everyone else.

A crucial aspect that needs to be addressed is that social and soft skills are not included sufficiently, and universities and colleges are receiving students without basic writing and communications skills. When education is seen as a 'right' or as a 'business', the ethos changes and reasons to attend courses change. Education should be seen as a privilege that is open to everyone if they work hard.

## **Sell the lifestyle**

Tourism and hotel management is a tough profession, but for the right people, it offers a great lifestyle and amazing opportunities.

The industry and universities need to do a better job of selling the lifestyle and help us attract better and more people. There are long hours yes, but skilled and unskilled labour is needed so we should focus on the attitude, not just the exam results. It's vital to interview as many people as possible and find out what forces drive them. Then when all suitable candidates have completed their basic training, select people for specialisation, including management.

## **More candidates from SA, more experience needed**

I am on the advisory board for hotel management courses at two leading universities to ensure the courses fully reflect the needs of the industry and produce graduates ready for the 21st century workplace. At HVS, we have also taken on an intern, though oddly enough, we received many more applicants from abroad than from South Africa. That needs to change.

It's unfortunate that operational salaries are so low that newly employed graduates often cannot afford to remain in the industry unless they quickly advance into management.

I received this interesting feedback from one of our interns: "I attended a prestigious higher learning institution in Africa specialising in International Hospitality Management and there were many lunchroom discussions and heated debates around the fact that Africa is a booming marketplace for the hotel industry - which is a phenomenon favourable for accommodation owners and guests alike, but not for hospitality professionals."

Interns and new graduates also feel that there is not enough on-the-job training provided by the hotels, and they do not feel equipped to handle challenges that arise. There needs to be a collaborative approach between the industry, universities, and students.

Hotel owners and brands can assist and support by exposing school children to the industry with work experience, showing them the fun and the opportunities, as well as taking interns from local colleges and working with local courses to teach what is actually needed.

## **Solving challenges faced by the continent's hospitality industry**

Another student working with us has launched a heartfelt plea to the industry that we continue engaging with the learning institutions that are training the next generation of hospitality professionals to develop course content that seeks to solve challenges faced by the continent's hospitality industry professionals that can also be transferred to other markets. These are topics like hotel development and pre-opening modules that will equip young minds with the tools for the trade. Africa is growing at a rapid rate, let us prepare our children to take charge of the possibilities.

As a society, it's important for us to understand how to deal with millennials coming into the hospitality sector and to explain to them that nothing beats hard work. No one is entitled to anything - you have to earn it.

We recently launched the THINC Africa Awards to honour the extraordinary in Africa's hotel industry, including an award for Best Hotel Student of the Year, to be announced at our upcoming THINC Africa conference in August. This is our way of giving back to the industry and offers the winning student access to amazing opportunities.

The hospitality industry is crucial for the growth of this economy, it takes skilled and unskilled labour to run a hotel. We ask for hard work and loyalty and, in return, you get to work with amazing people with the opportunity to travel anywhere. The industry offers constant opportunities to learn and grow and with no glass ceilings - it is up to you how high you fly. At a basic level, you will receive free meals, uniform, showers and often accommodation and will be learning skills that can be transferred to numerous other industries - if you want to leave...

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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