

Futureproofing your travel for 2019

 By [Andrew Stark](#)

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When the Finance Minister chooses an Aloe Ferox - that bitter, hardy and spiky indigenous species best known for its resilience in extreme climates - as a metaphor for the country's budget, you know you're in for a rather prickly year.



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It seems rather apt that Minister Tito Mboweni would choose this image. If there's one thing I know, regardless of budget and circumstance, South Africans are as hardy and resilient as that bitter aloe. We're survivors. We tackle everything in our stride from load-shedding to Day Zero. If that doesn't show resilience to almost-apocalyptic conditions, I don't know what will.

So, it may seem counter-intuitive that under such pressure, South Africans would reach into their pockets for something as "frivolous" as a holiday, no matter how well deserved it may be. And yet, they are... and in great numbers.

Travel is a necessity

For many South African travellers, holidays are no longer a luxury, but a necessity. In today's 24/7 world of constant notifications, travel has become a non-negotiable; that one thing that gets us through the tough times.

We saw just how resilient and how eager South Africans are to travel play out at the ninth annual Travel Expo which took place in Johannesburg on 9 and 10 February. For us, it was the greatest travel show South Africa has ever seen – achieving record-breaking results.

Over R50m in travel deals were booked, resulting in a 40% increase on last year's sales. Over 70% of bookings were international holidays.

Savvy South Africans look for the best deals

South Africans know that to futureproof their holidays, they need to book early to get the best deals.

The expo's massive success may have had something to do with the over 500 exclusive deals that some 200 global travel suppliers had put together for the South African market.

Over 30,000 people took part in the expo, which shows there is a huge appetite for travel, despite the country's lacklustre economy.

Rather than not travelling at all, South Africans are modifying their travel behaviour. The 10-night holiday in Europe might become a seven-night holiday somewhere close to home. We see destinations like Thailand and Bali, cruise holidays and all-inclusive resort stays as hugely popular among South Africans because of the value for money they represent.

Today's travellers are very savvy - often researching their holiday of choice online first, so that when they arrive at the expo, they have a good idea as to what a really great deal is. We keep sharpening our pencil, year after year, to ensure that we can really offer a 48-hour travel extravaganza.

Planting more local and lekker breaks

We've seen over the last 12 months that people are travelling a lot closer to home, which really is music to my ears. We have a great partnership with South African Tourism, encouraging locals to explore their own beautiful country.

Our Travel Stokvel initiative is booming, which is really no surprise – considering the increase in our "sin tax" (lo and behold wine drinkers and smokers), travellers are getting smarter when saving up for travel.

Opening the minds of all South Africans, that they can travel within and beyond our country, is incredibly exciting and rewarding. We launched Stokvel in 2018, harnessing the power of group buying and providing exclusive travel deals and invaluable advice for the group, and saw a 48% increase in sign-ups at this year's Travel Expo.

Growing an abundant travel and tourism sector

Travel is also essential for job creation and economic opportunity. If we're going to plant the seeds of renewal and growth, as Minister Mboweni put it, we need to see travel and tourism generate more opportunities for the over 6 million South Africans who are unemployed.

According to Stats SA, one in 23 people in South Africa is employed in the tourism sector. President Cyril Ramaphosa said in his State of the Nation address that there's "no reason" why 1.4 million direct tourism jobs couldn't be realised. I see no reason why not.

The growth of the tourism sector will not only create jobs but will spill over into youth empowerment and upskilling, gender equality, entrepreneurship and furthering career development. We feel very strongly about this – the Flight Centre Travel Group trains over 250, mostly female, South Africans on average, every year.

Creating a thriving travel and tourism sector bodes incredibly well for a prosperous South Africa, futureproofing not only our budgets but our very wellbeing. With our resilient, “aloe-like” South African natures and the ripe harvest of travel awaiting, we can look forward to embracing our "plum times" together.

ABOUT ANDREW STARK

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