

Growing tourism with innovative visitor experience design technology

As a major tourist destination, South Africa has much to offer international and local travellers - of which 10.3 million and 17.2 million were recorded respectively in South African Tourism's most recent annual report.

According to the Department of Tourism, tourism contributed R136.1bn (about 2.9%) to the total gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017. The department also identified the potential for this sector to grow from around 1.5 million jobs to 2.1 million over the next decade. Innovative visitor experience design on the up for tourism growth



Image via [Formula D interactive](#)

Visitor attractions have been forming the backbone of tourism, but to ensure continued growth in visitor numbers tourism destinations will need to stay on the forefront of global visitor attraction trends and technologies.

But how do visitor attractions ensure they are the first choice for tourists?

"South Africa has a lot to offer, but we cannot lean back and rely on Table Mountain, Safari parks and Robben Island," says Michael Wolf, CEO of attraction and visitor experience design consultancy, Formula D Interactive. "There are still major opportunities for visitor attractions along the major tourist routes." Adding that attractions need the right mix of uniqueness, thematic relevance and wow-factor.

Laws of attraction

Tourists visiting regions with more attractions tend to stay longer. Although the Western Cape received only the third highest number of international visitors, compared to other provinces, visitors stay on average 14 days and spend almost double that of other provinces, according to the tourism annual report.

The top attractions visited include the V&A Waterfront, with over 1.16 million visitors and Cape Point with over 940,000 visitors. The Table Mountain Cable Way had 799,000 visitors. Comparatively, the Kruger Park saw over 390 000 people pass through the gates, while the Apartheid Museum had 301,000 visitors in the same year. Other landmarks receiving high visitor foot traffic included Robben Island (331,000 visitors), Mandela House in Soweto (234,000 visitors) and Constitution Hill (111,000 visitors).

"Like any other product or service, tourism destinations compete against each other for visitor numbers, drawing on factors such as novelty, unique selling propositions, and relevance to the potential audiences," Wolf explains. "Regions in South Africa that are not as well positioned as the Western Cape would do good to strategically develop flagship tourism experiences to increase their attraction value in a growing industry."

Embrace innovation

Last year, Formula D was commissioned to lead a visitor experience upgrade at The Old Fort on the Constitution Hill precinct, by using technology and innovative design to showcase South Africa's history and journey to democracy. The exhibits included cutting edge innovations, like a hologram of Joe Slovo, bringing him back to life in a cell.

It's this kind of innovation that visitor centres need to adopt in order to remain relevant to their audience, explains Wolf.

"It's crucial that the tourism industry considers international trends and the exact needs of the target audiences. Innovation in attractions design doesn't necessarily mean that the content of the offerings is revolutionised. We believe that innovation can be expected when classical formats are being disrupted."



Constitution Hill's Old Fort upgrades its visitor experience

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International research indicates that tourists are constantly requiring new attractions or more innovation at old ones. Modern visitor centres are employing a model of **Entertainment, Excitement and Education**. This has seen tourism destinations looking at ways to entertain visitors, excite them – often using adrenalin-inducing activities such as at amusement parks, and to provide thought-provoking content or opportunities for reflection.

Wolf adds: "We will see more and more shopping malls that become in parts museums, family outings that are informal learning spaces, or petrol stations with major roadside tourism offerings."

Formula D will soon see the launch of their latest project, which is an innovative mixture of family entertainment, gaming arcade and learning centre.

The tech trend

Embracing social media, immersive audio-visual technology and virtual reality will become important to the future of tourism destinations, Wolf believes.

According to presentations at Attractions Africa's 2018 conference, by next year millennials are expected to make 50% of

global travellers, with around 300 million trips. In the next 5 to 10 years, these millennial travellers will become the industry's core base. With their more tech-savvy approach, millennials are changing the way travel is consumed and visitor centres will have to develop more technologically appealing offerings.

Tourist attractions will also have to adapt to include new experiences, such as audio tours and digital signboards, as well as real-time social media engagement.

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