

Food and agricultural technology can enable the emerging tourism sector across Africa

By [Ogaufi Maripe](#)

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Tourism is an important growth industry for Africa. In 2017, tourism contributed 8.1% to Africa's GDP. This sector is an important economic driver for many SADC and East African countries enabling diversification from natural resources dominant industries.



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Tourists are attracted to Africa's unique and beautiful landscapes, wildlife and history. When paying top dollar, tourists coming to see the natural environment/ecosystems are demanding a high quality, fresh and healthy food and beverage experience. The tourism sector has been in the past decades dominated by baby boomers, but research shows that this is changing as more millennials are becoming more adventurous and more demanding of fresh and traceable food.

Country	% of GDP contributed by Tourism 2017	Growth in Tourism Forecast 2018
South Africa	8.9%	2.9%
Botswana	11.5%	4.9%
Rwanda	12.7%	6.8%
Kenya	9.7%	5.5%

To attract and retain these high-value international visitors, hotel, lodge operators and safari camps are adapting and needing to up their game as it relates to the food and dining experiences, all while facing local, challenging agricultural growing conditions driven by climate change and poor distribution infrastructure.

Despite travelling thousands of miles from home, travellers expect quality fresh produce; vegan options and healthy meals. Many lodges operate in remote areas with difficult "last mile" logistics to supply fresh produce, meat and dairy that require long shelf life. In Botswana for example, it is rare to find agriculture and tourism in the same sentence, but the growing demand for fresh produce in the tourism industry is providing a foundation for change. Food and agricultural technology have the opportunity to help support and transform the dining experience and quality of food tourism industry offers guests – and to support the tourism industry to grow and create jobs.



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I interviewed Michelle Adelman, the managing director of Accite Holdings, who has been investing in food and agricultural technology businesses in southern Africa for the past seven years and winner of CEO Magazine's *Africa's Most Influential Woman In Business & Professional Services* in 2017. She shared some of the innovations Accite is driving to support the tourism industry.

Controlled environment agriculture technology

Go Fresh! Hydroponic greenhouses operate just 10km from the safari industry logistics hub of Maun, Botswana. Using hydroponics and controlled environment agriculture technology, Go Fresh! Is able to grow high-quality fresh produce, including fancy lettuce, culinary herbs, cucumbers, peppers and tomatoes at the safari industry's doorstep, 365-days a year - despite operating on the edge of the Kalahari Desert. Produce is picked fresh to order, delivered just 10 short km to the operators' hubs and delivers the same day into four and five-star safari camps.

One of those safari camps includes Jao Reserve Camp (Ngamiland Adventure Safaris), which Go Fresh! has been supplying with fresh produce for the past two years. Cindy Swart, an executive chef from Jao Reserve Camp said: "We have been using products from Go Fresh! for years and have always had a great relationship with them as a supplier. I have been very happy with the quality of the product as well as the level of service from the team on the ground.

"Always willing to listen to new ideas and tailor new products according to our new menu needs. Purely from an aesthetic point of view the Go Fresh! produce always looks fresh and appetizing. Their baby lettuce and herb mix, for example, makes a delightful salad base making a beautiful display for buffets."

Innovating menus and the dining experience

Chefs collaborate with Go Fresh! growers to request new produce and herbs to help them innovate their menu's and dining experience. Go Fresh! employs youth and women from Maun providing a platform for the economic benefits of tourism to trickle down into the local community.

Infinite Foods is bringing the best international plant-based protein brands to sub-Saharan Africa - with an initial focus on the tourism industry. The livestock industry is a major impactor on the natural environment tourists are coming to appreciate in Africa. The livestock industry is responsible for 51% of global greenhouse emissions, 45% of the worlds surface area and 29% of the agricultural water use.

Plant-based food technology is delivering substitutes for meat, eggs and dairy that are authentic tasting and better for the environment that the tourists are coming to admire. These products also have a better shelf life which enables tourism operators to better manage their logistics and costs.

Plant-based food additions

Infinite Foods is launching the widely popular American brand the *Beyond Burger* - a plant-based hamburger in the South African and Botswana markets and expanding to east and west Africa in 2019. Beyond Burger delivers all the protein and nutrients of a beef burger without the cholesterol. Additional products, such as plant-based scrambled eggs from Just, Inc. will be delivered to the market in early 2019.

Another innovative company launched is Crossover Quality Meats. Similar to Infinite Foods, Crossover is building on the increasing awareness of consumers about the environmental impact of the meat they eat. Crossover offers all-natural blended meat products that deliver protein and nutrition but at 30% less cost. The Chief Quality Meat (TM) burger is a chicken/beef blend that tastes like 100% beef but with 50% less negative impact on the environment. Crossover Quality Meats aims to deliver environmentally sensitive products to the tourism industry while offering affordable protein access to global consumers.

These food and agricultural technologies are helping Africa transform its horticulture production and deliver environmentally friendly, high-quality food to the tourism industry and consequently give international tourists the dining experience they expect and demand. The objective is to protect the environment and grow a critical growth sector for Africa.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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