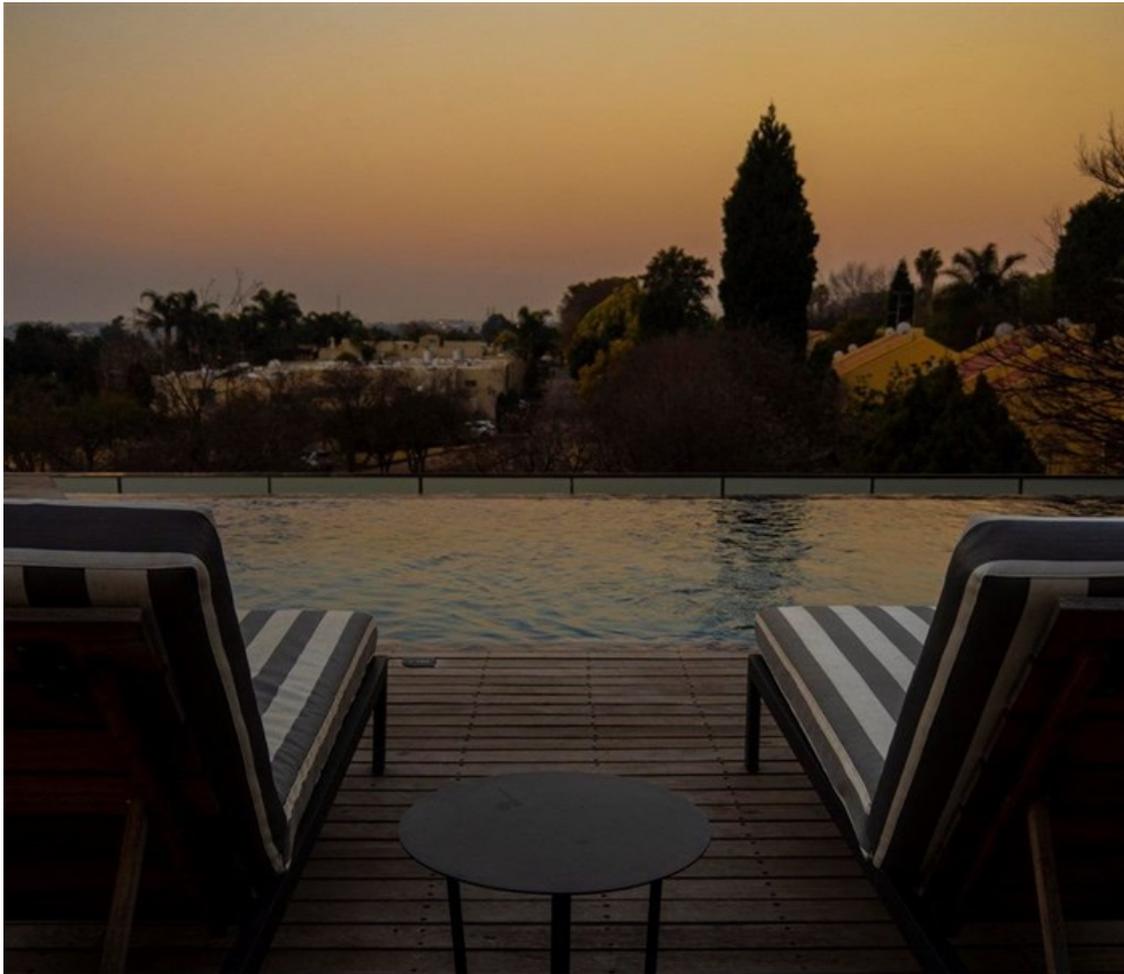


Hats off (and masks on) to those on the frontline of local tourism

 By [Ryan Enslin](#)

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The readiness of the local tourism industry to reopen for leisure travel has been much on people's minds of late. Reports of all sorts have been debated in the media and social conversations continue to stir up emotions, hitting many a raw nerve. Under current level-3 lockdown regulations leisure travel is not permitted, President Cyril Ramaphosa made this very clear in a recent address. At stake are many South Africans' livelihoods and basic ability to generate an income and provide for their families.



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In an industry that serves almost 1,5 million of the economically active population in South Africa, and in an economy that was already ailing before the onset of Covid-19, the stakes couldn't be higher.

My travel-writing colleague and friend Di Brown wrote an article recently, titled [The Tourism Dilemma](#), in which she raised some tough questions. In this time of global crisis, aka Covid-19, it is imperative that such questions are asked, debated and considered.

Let the debate begin

The article sparked a lively conversation between ourselves and the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA), who continue to have significant input into the Covid-19 Protocols for Tourism Industry Operations. These protocols serve

as national governments guideline for the sector during the Covid-19 era. They are also actively petitioning government to reopen the sector, as soon as possible.

Following this engagement, Di penned (as it were) a follow-up article titled [#IamSafe2travel](#): being a responsible traveller will safeguard our tourism industry. It had become clear to us that the consumer, that's you and I, have an active role to play in maintaining a safe domestic leisure travel industry here in South Africa.

It most certainly is not merely the responsibility of industry role-players.

Let's go see

In an attempt to more fully understand the situation, I decided to visit The Capital on The Park Hotel in my hometown of Joburg. Located in Sandton, the 'business resort' as it is termed, has been operating as a self-isolation facility since the onset of lockdown as well as catering to business travellers.

I arrived armed with a fresh reading of the protocols, having duly noted the key points on my phone for easy reference. Keen to observe the protocols in action, and understand how they would impact on my stay-experience, I also sought to gain insight into my role as the consumer in this newly-styled tourism transaction.

Approaching the hotel that Thursday afternoon my mind was awash with two very distinct sets of emotions. On the one hand I was once again able to travel, with all the excitement and anticipation such occasions muster in my wanderlust-infused mind. On the other hand, I was somewhat apprehensive about what I would encounter, moving out of the safe zone of my home and about to charter new waters. My mind immediately went to the staff working in this sector, for whom this is a daily reality.

Based on my understanding of the protocols, would I encounter red flags that should be of concern to me. What would I do if indeed I did?

What I found

Patience.

You are going to need a modicum of patience to allow the service provider (through the protocols) to effectively manage this new reality; and work towards keeping us all safe. Although the time to check-in is not greatly impacted, there is additional paperwork to be completed. There is also an initial obligation to disclose relevant information upon arrival (such as health status, comorbidities and similar matters) and an on-going obligation to share any changes in this information, as well as regular temperature checks.

And sanitise. Staff are always encouraging you to sanitise.

Maximum two people in a lift at any one time does mean you may take a little longer to move around the facility. And your room may look a little sparse and less decorated than you may expect. But there is a well thought-out reason for everything. Just do your part, and remember – patience.

Behind the scenes

The Capital on The Park allowed me unrestricted access throughout their property, which afforded me, amongst other things, first-hand experience of the protocol-compliant linen store. Staff fully kitted, head to toe in PPE, attended to the sorting of soiled linen, as required, in a separate area.

Speaking to other members of staff during my stay I found a heightened awareness of the new-normal the protocols mean in their day-to-day lives. Things may work a little differently but the virus, and how to combat it in the tourism space, is foremost in their minds. It has to be as they are on the frontline facing a very real threat, if not managed properly. As consumers, our actions also form part of how that management takes place.

Those initial emotions

I'm glad to report that my experience was a safe and enjoyable one, with The Capital on the Park complying with, and in many instances going beyond, the protocols. They have adapted well thanks to a mindset that sees challenges as opportunities, a lesson for many in the industry. However the sense of awareness and ever-vigilant mindset of the consumer further serves to complete the circle of an effective Covid-19 management approach one that keeps us all safe.

Is the industry ready to reopen?

Hands down, yes they are. Sanitised hands that is.

The protocols are in place, management have signed pledges to abide by these protocols, staff are trained, facilities have been adapted and hand sanitiser salesmen are having a bumper year. As President Cyril Ramaphosa said, it is now in our hands.

Let every South African longing to enjoy domestic travel once again bring their part to the table and ensure that once the industry reopens, it not only remains open, but safe for all. Including those on the front-line of tourism.

Ryan Enslin was a guest of The Capital on The Park Hotel.

ABOUT RYAN ENSLIN

Ryan Enslin is an accountant by training, a writer and content creator at heart and, by day, an avid proponent of the tourism and hospitality industry. Exploring and story-telling are the name of his game as he seeks to weigh-in on the relevant conversations of the day.

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