

# What the future picture of travel could look like, in a post-Covid world

South Africa's tourism and hospitality sectors have been dealt several severe blows over the last year - largely because of the global lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19. In 2020, SA welcomed only 2.8-million tourists, a 72.6% drop from the previous year.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

Restrictions, general fear of the virus and a growing preference to travel locally in the face of tough economic times has meant a significant decline in business travellers and holidaymakers in every city across the country.

Stats SA recorded an increase in tourist numbers of up to 200,000 in December, though this was still down 80% from the same month in 2019.

But what will the world of travel look like once we manage to beat the pandemic?

According to Wahida Parker, managing director of Table Mountain Aerial Cableway, people are eager to travel freely again but will do things differently in the future.

"We have all changed the way we do things, and many of these habits have now become a part of how we live. The pandemic has also seen businesses and technology evolve rapidly to allow people to stay connected – all of which will help

to define what travel will look like in the next few years."

Traditional and well-established daily routines, such as commuting to work or going to the mall, have been replaced with video calls and online shopping. In the same vein, much of the world's travel and holiday routines will change too – from long haul flights to crowded social events, the move to travel closer to home and a preference for more individualistic experiences in line with the need to remain socially distanced is set to become the norm.

"People are taking a renewed interest in all the unique places that they can visit closer to home," says Parker.

"While domestic vacations will remain the way to go for most travellers until the end of 2021, I believe that people are also eager to begin travelling internationally. What we expect to see in the future is a more balanced appreciation for both types of travel," she adds.

## Changing travel behaviours

With most travel plans put on hold or cancelled, many people have been dreaming about their next big holiday. "The difference, however, will be how they do it. They want to know that the places they go to are safe, offer socially distanced attractions and have adapted their operations to cater to a new reality," explains Parker.

In a report published earlier this year by TripAdvisor, consumer confidence was seen to be increasing, with many respondents indicating that they will travel abroad in 2021, particularly in the second half of the year. At the crux of it, the study noted that the widespread roll-out of vaccines will not just boost travellers' confidence to venture out, it will also influence where leisure travellers are prepared to go to.

"For South Africa, the effective roll-out of our vaccine programme will be critical for us to open our borders again and provide international tourists with the certainty that we are safe to visit," points out Parker.

Analysts have already begun highlighting several emerging trends, many of them a mix of pre- and post-Covid.

Topping the list is a greater focus on health and hygiene, which is the biggest and most fundamental behavioural shift the world has made. Others include:

- **Increasing importance of travel insurance:** With thousands of South Africans having lost their non-refundable deposits, flight tickets and hotel bookings, travellers are likely to get travel insurance, or improve their cover, to safeguard against any worst-case scenarios.
- **Covid passports:** Many European countries are exploring and implementing the 'Covid Passports' that will allow people with proof of their vaccination to travel internationally.
- **Getting outdoors will become first choice:** After spending months at home, many have reconsidered their health and wellness choices and are looking for attractions and destinations that allow them to breathe in the fresh air and continue activities in a socially distanced manner.
- **Package deals:** With tighter budgets, holidaymakers and business travellers alike will be on the lookout for package deals and partnerships between companies that help them get the most bang for their buck.
- **Multigenerational travel will grow:** With the world forced into a state of lockdown, many loved ones have been separated and unable to visit each other. When the world starts to normalize, this pre-Covid travel trend will come into its own as multigenerational travel bookings and holidays increase in demand.
- **A desire for more space:** There will be a growing expectation for businesses, airlines, and attractions to introduce technologies and systems that effectively move people in and out of buildings quickly, reduce queues and ensure that

visitors have a comfortable space between themselves and others.

- **More breaks, closer to home:** The pandemic has helped us all to realize the value of taking time out for regular, short breaks close to home instead of waiting an entire year to take one long, often remote break that requires mass transit travel to reach.

- **Sustainability:** People's sense of community support and the need to pay it forward in tough times have made many realize that a holiday can be more than just good for the soul, but also for the economy, especially SMME's and small towns that now stand to benefit from the rise in domestic holidays.

"As restrictions lift, the travel and tourism industry in South Africa is ready and waiting to welcome visitors back – having adapted its offerings and services to meet the changing needs of those returning to our shores," concludes Parker.

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