

Latest tourism figures reflect changing travel landscape

Statistics SA has released tourism figures for December 2010 and the results point to a shift in traditional source markets, with some serious growth in Asian-Pacific visitors.



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Whilst overall arrivals to the country were said to be up 10.3% from 672 862 to 742 241, overseas arrivals were up by 5.5% on December 2009 with 196 739 arrivals. Large increases in soccer-mad German (up 10.4%) and French (up 6.9%) visitors may well be a direct spin-off from new perceptions formed during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, but does not explain an 8% decline in Italian arrivals. Traditionally a strong source market for SA, the United Kingdom was down by 7.6% but still accounted for the most visitors - 52 222.

In a continuing trend, Asian markets grew substantially. Australia was up 17.5% with 10 426 arrivals and Indian visitors to SA rose by a whopping 78.7% from 3665 to 6549. Strong growth also came out of Canada - up 19.4%.

Working together to build on good perceptions

Says Cape Town Tourism, CEO Mariette du Toit-Helmbold, "In the post-World Cup environment, South Africa's tourism organisations have worked cohesively to capitalise on the good perception formed during the games, with targeted markets in new source markets. India is one of these and we are already seeing the fruits of this engagement."

Another possible contributor to the rise of non-traditional markets points to these markets' ability to recover from the global recession. India in particular is booming, with plenty of trade emerging for them off the back of bleak markets. South Africa's recent inclusion in BRICS - along with counterparts Brazil, Russia, India and China - has fostered alliances and opportunities within this group of emerging economies, no doubt spurring on more inter-exploration of these regions. Business tourism is set to become an important factor in tourism growth with 75% of visitors from India travelling to South Africa for business reasons.

World Cup boosted arrivals, but...

Speaking in Parliament on 1 March 2011, Tourism Minister, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, cited tourism as an important growth element for the SA economy stating that South Africa recorded a 15.1% increase in tourist arrivals to the country in 2010. He said that it was important to acknowledge that the particularly good growth in South Africa's arrivals figures was undoubtedly given a significant boost by the World Cup, but noted that growth was not driven only by the 2010 FIFA World Cup as the results of a survey on arrivals during that period show that these arrivals only represented about 4% of the total arrivals for 2010.

Says Du Toit-Helmbold, "What we are seeing in these stats is the immediate result of a changing tourism landscape. We have cautioned that the face of tourism is changing, and rapidly; the new tourist is here already and we simply can't do things the same way we always did. It's time to create products that meet more diverse needs and interests; Cape Town's inspirational story, beauty and people have global appeal. However, we must also remember that Cape Town is not only a destination for international visitors but that we welcome domestic travellers from across the country each year too, and we must be mindful of the products and standard of service offered to these travellers if we are to counter seasonality in the Cape.", she concludes.

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