

# A pioneering approach to the hospitality industry

 By [Shaun Lamont](#)

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The world is on the move and people are travelling more than ever. It is estimated that by 2030 a global population of 8.5 billion people will take approximately 2 billion international trips, according to a report by the World Tourism Organisation.



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While travel has progressed in leaps and bounds, so have travellers, which means hospitality players need to be constantly transforming and enhancing themselves. This is key to delivering the right mix of services to cater to guests from existing and new emerging market segments.

We've seen how over the years the traditional hospitality model has developed into a more multi-faceted approach - from the basic amenities such as swimming pools, gyms, tennis courts and possibly a golf course to nowadays state-of-the-art business centres and health spas that encompass so much more than just a vacation destination. These developments have also had a substantial influence on the economic growth of the hospitality industry.

## Riding the wave of travel trends

Let's face it, what kept customers happy 10 years ago no longer works today, and unless you embrace the ever-changing travel trends of consumers you will find yourself left in the dust.



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**Technology** is top of the list for the way in which it has forever changed the way we travel. The internet, smartphones, electronic payments and the power of social media have given consumers a voice directly to venues and with each other. While this can be challenging in some instances, it also brings an opportunity to embrace low-cost, wide-reaching platforms that allow instant communication with our market and a potent means of quality control. We need to bear in mind that as consumers use technology they become more knowledgeable about hospitality on a global scale and with that their expectations become greater.

Another topical travel trend is **eco-friendly tourism**, especially with the impact of Cape Town's water crisis. 'Going Green' is no longer just a buzz phrase and it's only a matter of time before green practices in the hospitality industry become a baseline requirement. Our industry is can influence change, and there needs to be a progressive step in that direction. We want guests to be part of the sustainable tourism experience when visiting our properties in the hope that this will lead to them adopting some of these measures when they return home.

**Health and wellness** is a global awareness drive that has become a travel trend influencer as well. Healthier lifestyles now dictate the type of hotels or resorts where these travellers want to stay, and their decisions are based on the amenities and even the menu offered. For many, it could be the 'deal breaker' when planning a vacation or business trip, and it's not limited to health spas or a golf course. An array of activities such as mountain biking, hiking trails and horse-riding that cater to an outdoor healthier entertainment programme are being sought after.

Thanks to a 'mobile-job' era, business travellers are now taking the opportunity of a few extra days of relaxation while attending to business, making the **bleisure** trend an emerging global phenomenon. Considering our tight economy, this offers an affordable way of rejuvenation which will grow this category of travel in 2018 and beyond.

## Promoting local tourism

There's so much available in our own backyard. South Africa is widely known as one of the most sought-after destinations in the world, thanks to our abundance of natural beauty, pristine coastlines, exciting wildlife and berg experiences, great weather and our unique rainbow nation of diverse cultures that is steeped in history.

Whether it's for brand-new discoveries, or returning to old favourites, hospitality players are perfectly positioned to encourage holidaymakers to learn more about our country's beauty and heritage, which includes the promotion and support of local economies and communities as well. Ensure that your staff are kept up to date with the local tourist hub so that they can encourage guests to explore nearby attractions, taste the local cuisine and support the local artists and entrepreneurs. This approach will play a pivotal role in making a far-reaching impact on the local tourism value chain.

## Service at the heart of the industry

Here's the thing: we are constantly working on multiple channels to improve our operations and service levels. And why? Because we know that there is nothing more important in the hospitality industry.



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The direct spin-off to great service is skills training and development. So, if you are not investing in staff training you are bound to face challenges in service delivery and ultimately struggle to stay afloat in the current economy. Training needs to

encompass all aspects of your business, as each person impacts customer service in one way or another. Furthermore, an investment in skills training is the best way to reduce employee turnover, which is one of the biggest drains on the hospitality industry.

Bear in mind that while all customers are not the same, there is one thing that makes them all happy – superior service. Because when you think about it, the agenda of our industry is to make people happy.

## ABOUT SHAUN LAMONT

Shaun Lamont is the Managing Director of First Group. His career spans 21 years in hospitality management, during which time he has acquired a wealth of valuable industry insight from both a local and global perspective. This is attributed to a wide ranged portfolio that includes the management of offshore operations and new venture acquisitions.

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