

Radical innovation necessary to revive tourism in the Bay

 By [Glenn van Eck](#)

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The drop in the number of holidaymakers over the summer holiday season in the Bay and the consistent decline in market share in the Eastern Cape over the last decade indicate that a new inclusive strategy is urgently needed to build both domestic and international numbers to destinations throughout the Eastern Cape. Downward momentum is a difficult trend to reverse and we need to maximise the potential of all areas of our tourism offering.



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Embracing the meetings market

I believe that one of the segments with the highest potential to regain our tourism market share and numbers is the meetings and incentives sector. The potential is clear when considering that 22% of the global tourism business comes from the meeting industry. Not only is this a significant figure, it increases its strategic importance when considering that those on business spend five times more than the spend by leisure tourists.

We need to embrace the authentic conference and incentive product variety that the Eastern Cape has to offer and showcase these to our country and the world. The traditional destinations around the country offer a decreasing attraction in a market where creating memorable and fresh experiences are the key to this segment of the tourism market. Companies invest millions in developing a new product or service and then need to stand out in a market that is totally over-communicated.

I believe that the meetings market is changing dramatically at the moment. Markets want to be blown away by every aspect of the experience of the get-together and the unauthentic 'same old' venues traditionally used by corporates no longer excite the new generations of businesspeople and consumers. As an industry, we need to reconnect with our target markets and discover what matters most in their lives. Then we need to package our offerings to meet their needs and market them aggressively.

Competitive advantage

While Nelson Mandela Bay and East London are the main regional hubs for local and regional meetings in the Eastern Cape, it's a shame that many of national and international corporates within the province's borders hold their big events in the larger business centres only.

So, we need to rethink our competitive advantage and package it effectively so that we offer authentic experiences that mitigate our competitive challenges such as airfares. Access for international delegates is also more convenient and cheaper to Cape Town and Johannesburg and we need to develop and market compelling meeting experiences to be competitive.

Exposure for the province

Working within the industry for 35 years, Magnetic Storm has forged long-term relationships with national and international businesses operating in the Eastern Cape and we mostly work with the internal communications departments or HR teams. Most larger organisations have their marketing teams in larger centres and often this results in the big product launches and meetings being held in these destinations. We need Eastern Cape corporates to lead the exposure of our province as an authentic business destination that offers an attractive alternative to the established product experiences that no longer inspire wow.

It is time for radical innovation in tourism in the Eastern Cape. We need a solution where all marketing agencies and private enterprise role players develop a common, desirable vision and have a team approach to taking our packages to market. An important element of this is that our corporates start using our authentic gems for their national and international business get-togethers.

We have the opportunity to create the momentum that will boost the economic future and provide opportunities for our communities in the Eastern Cape. I believe that this possibility should be enough to excite us and drive the regeneration of the partnerships between the role-players that created our successes and prosperity of the last decade.

ABOUT GLENN VAN ECK

Glenn is a true entrepreneur. From the age of 16, he has been involved with Magnetic Storm, initially by assisting his brother with the setting up and de-rigging of AV equipment and thereafter maintenance of equipment; and at 25 years of age Glenn purchased Magnetic Storm. Fast forward to 2016 and Glenn is still at the helm of the business, and has grown a two-man disco to a full-service events and tech company with offices in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town, servicing the entire country.

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