

Family travel in 2019 and trends to tap into this #TourismMonth

By  Sharmila Ragunanan

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September is Tourism Month in South Africa. Just ahead of the peak family travel season, it's an ideal time for businesses to be promoting domestic tourism and to encourage a culture of travel among locals.



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Based on figures by GlobalData, an international data and analytics company, family travel is poised for continued growth in the coming years. The company estimates that the outbound family travel market will grow from 300-million trips in 2017 to 376-million by 2022. The forecast opens up more opportunities for Southern Africa's tourism industry, especially businesses that offer families something beyond the norm.

More multi-generational trips

Multi-generational travel has become a top trend this year and tourism marketers constantly need to reframe what the traditional travel family unit looks like. These days, it's not just two parents and their children away together. Cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents, are embarking on multi-generational family holidays, too. At times it can even be a single parent, one child and a grandparent.

Milestone birthdays and anniversaries are an opportunity for families to reunite their whole brood. Marketers take note. Grandparents, in particular, yearn to maintain family traditions and share destinations that are special to them, be it a beach on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast (think the historic Blue Marlin Hotel in Scottburgh), or a lodge such as the Finfoot Lake Reserve in the Pilanesberg. Instead of 'glamping', think 'gramping'— when three generations take a camping or outdoors-oriented trip together.

Multi-generational groups also actively seek destinations that effortlessly cater for the needs and interests of all family members. For suppliers, flexibility is the keyword here, be it dietary requirements, meal times, activities, sleeping

arrangements, and even early check-in or late check-out.

All eyes on Gen Alpha

Millennials have been an important travel market for some time, but this generation is growing up, and so are their offspring.

Generation Alpha (those born after 2010) is one for travel and tourism stakeholders to keep an eye on. These individuals are generally characterised as more tech-savvy and information-supplied than their parents, swiping tablets before they can could speak, and will no doubt increasingly have a heavy weigh in on the holiday decision-making process.

Suppliers take note, you will need to do more to tap into what these kids want and need to fall in with their parents. When it comes to researching this new generation, start focusing on your current family unit customers for valued feedback.

Tapping into brand loyalty

Travel-loving Millennials are set to continue their 'experiences over stuff' globetrotting lifestyle throughout parenthood. They desire their little Gen Alphas to become citizens of the world, which plays in nicely for the world of tourism businesses, hotels and marketers who pay attention.

Remember, these young families practice ongoing brand awareness. They value authenticity and don't like being 'sold' to. Now is the time to be building sincere, authentic relationships with your parent-customers. This loyalty will likely filter down to their kids, who will soon become your customers, too.

While not much is known yet about the buying habits of the younger generations, investing in new families now is always smart in the long-term for travel stakeholders, especially holiday accommodation groups that want to level up on value-adds and scale their property portfolios.

Refining child-friendly

There is a big difference between child-tolerant and child-friendly. It goes beyond having an extra bed in the parents' suite.

To really tap into the market, consider child-specific programmes to entertain kids, babysitting services and even dedicated tour guides and qualified rangers to help interpret the natural world through storytelling and crafts. In our experience, it is vital to invest in appropriate staff training that meets the needs of and accommodate younger guests. Attentive staff that can pre-empt the needs of a family is something that they do appreciate.

ABOUT SHARMILA RAGUNANAN

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