

Renewed focus on domestic, intra African travellers among top themes for 2023

By [Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa](#)

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Last year was a challenging year for us in the tourism sector because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions that came along with it. When the year started there were many unknowns but at the heart of those unknowns was a sector made of determined business owners who wanted to save jobs, the country's economy and our pride and joy which is the many beautiful tourism establishments.



Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa, CEO, Tourism Business Council of South Africa

2023 is however starting on a different and positive note. Data from Stats SA points to a sector that is recovering with an increase of over 100% in arrivals into the country. Last year we also saw the introduction of direct flights from international countries such as Germany directly to Kruger National Park. We expect that these are the makings of a bumper tourism season for 2023.

With that said, a few notable things are expected to top the trends that we as an industry body will be watching. It is our hope that these will help the tourism sector and reach our goals of growing the tourism sector to the over 3% contribution to the country's GDP we last saw in 2019.

Renewed focus on domestic travelers

One of the significant things that the pandemic showed us as a sector is that domestic travellers are the bedrock of our industry. We saw an increase last year as well in the amount of domestic travel. Many of our members recalibrated their pricing to allow South Africans to afford seeing their country throughout the year. South Africa offers value for money for local travellers in that we have several options available for the different pockets and affordability levels of local consumers.

However, to fully tap into the domestic market we need to increase capacity of airlines. A few of the airlines that operate domestic routes have announced plans for this increased capacity. It is a move that we as an industry body welcome.

Increase in intra-Africa travel

The Tourism Business Council of South Africa's (TBCSA) leadership conference held last September saw a revision of the

tourism industry's 2030 growth strategy. Part of the plan includes a focus on growing the rest of the African continent as a key growth market for South Africa.

Data from Stats SA shows that travellers who visited South Africa from the rest of the continent increased by over 130% in the third quarter of 2022. This is proof that there is interest to travel to South Africa by our neighbours. Research by Forward Keys shows that if intra-Africa travel is tapped into this could lead to a more robust tourism recovery.

We are on the right path as the country recently announced that as of January 2023 Kenyan nationals will no longer require a visa to travel to South Africa on holiday. Visa waivers are something that we as the TBCSA have been lobbying for. It is our hope that more African countries will be granted these waivers to help facilitate the ease of travel required around the continent.

Another strong signal for our focus on growing Africa as a key source market is the launch of Southern African Development Community (SADC) Tourism Business Platform (TBP). This body comprises 16 SADC member states. I serve as interim chairman of this body, and I am looking forward to seeing how our work to advance the sustainable development of the regional tourism industry will fare in boosting arrivals from the continent.

Thriving mice sector

I was one of the many advocates for the migration from zoom and back to in-person gatherings. This year we are going to see more of those in-person conferences. Starting with our own industry events such as meetings Africa, Tourism Indaba and even our very own second edition of the TBCSA leadership conference later this year.

South Africa is among the leaders in business tourism globally. Data from South African Tourism published in 2019 shows that about 800,000 people travel to South Africa annually for business, generating millions for the economy. Before the pandemic, the Department of Tourism showed that South Africa hosted 211,000 regional, national, and international meetings, conferences, and exhibitions. This just further strengthens the case for investing in our MICE industry.

One of our members the Seeza network, for example, will be bringing three conferences with a collective economic benefit of R11m.

Better engagement on policy between government, private sector

I've mentioned that last year we at the TBCSA held our inaugural leadership conference where we discussed among other things the importance of a working relationship between the private and public sectors in the tourism sector. It is our view that a strong working relationship will allow us to achieve our goal of 15 million arrivals by 2030.

The relationship between us and the private sector is something that we are going to keep working on this year. We have formed working groups for example through our memorandum of understanding with South African tourism and have consistently held dialogues with our colleagues at home affairs, tourism, and transport. This year we want to increase those

engagements for the better good of the sector.

ABOUT TSHIFHIWA TSHIVHENGWA

Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa is the Chief Executive Officer of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa. Tshivhengwa holds an MSc in International Business, Leadership, and Management from the University of York, Bachelor of Business Administration on Marketing Communications (Institute of Marketing Management) Diploma in Marketing (Institute of Marketing Management) and a National Diploma in Tourism Management (University of Johannesburg).

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