

Saudi tourism to SA soars 177% on inclusive tourism footprint

Travel marketing platform, Sojern, has released insights into South Africa's boom in travel as of September 2023, with a special focus on the burgeoning Saudi Arabian market, an untapped market experiencing a 177% increase in travel searches year-on-year. Comparing to September 2022, the data reveals a diverse and dynamic traveller profile, highlighting the importance of inclusive tourism to cater to the unique needs of Muslim travellers.



Source: ©Cathy Yeulet via [123RF](#)

Weekly flight/hotel search

A surge in weekly hotel searches has emerged in September 2023, marking a significant contrast to the previous two years. Concurrently, flight searches have regained pre-pandemic 2019 levels, indicating a revived interest and burgeoning demand for South African destinations as the upcoming high season approaches.

Search travel lead time

A diverse range of travellers are embarking on their South African adventures. A considerable 28% are seeking trips within the next seven days, while 25% are planning their journeys for more than three months ahead, particularly targeting the peak summer months from November to March. This data paints a vivid picture of eagerness and anticipation as international travellers eagerly secure their flights.

Trip duration

Over one-third (33%) of travellers are exploring trips lasting from 4 to 7 days, while a notable 17% are considering extended stays of 8 to 14 days. Additionally, nearly one-third (30%) of international travellers are opting for trips lasting over 15 days.

These statistics present opportunities for Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) as visitors demonstrate a strong desire to immerse themselves in the rich South African experience.



Rapidly growing Muslim travel market an exciting opportunity for SA tourism

14 May 2018



Distance and traveller composition

South Africa's allure is captivating nearly half (49%) of visitors traveling from over 3,000 miles away, representing a slight increase compared to the previous year.

When analysing flight searches, which provide a more accurate representation of group size compared to hotel searches, where individual travellers book rooms for multiple people, the diverse traveller composition remains consistent. Solo adventurers comprise 68%, couples account for 19%, and families make up 13%, each undoubtedly seeking their unique South African journey.

Feeder markets and Saudi surge

South Africa is witnessing a diverse influx from top feeder markets, including the US (24%), UK (6%), Germany (6%), and the Oceanic region (4%), after South African domestic travellers comprising 35% of total flight search volume since the beginning of the year. However, the spotlight is on the remarkable surge from Saudi Arabia, which takes the fifth and seventh spots respectively for hotel and flight search volume.

This indicates a growing fascination with South Africa's diverse landscapes, cultures, and experiences and aligns with projections of increased arrivals from the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, between 2023 and 2030.

Embracing diversity in marketing strategies

The recent surge in visitors from Saudi Arabia, with a 187% increase in flight searches for the start of the high season in November year-on-year, underscores the importance of fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment for all, including Muslim travellers.

The tourism industry is called upon to ensure facilities and services are tailored to meet the unique needs of this growing source market, embracing diversity and inclusivity as cornerstones of South African hospitality.



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10 Oct 2017



Stewart Smith, managing director MEA, Sojern, comments: "As the surge in travellers from Saudi Arabia highlights, South Africa continues to be an attractive and diverse destination. It's imperative for the tourism industry to embrace inclusivity as a core value, catering to the unique needs of Muslim travellers. Employing a strategic digital marketing strategy to promote Halal-friendly services, access to prayer facilities, and modest and family friendly environments is essential in building trust and rapport with this growing source market.

"Awareness of the Islamic calendar, offering alcohol-free options, and demonstrating cultural sensitivity are also essential when planning campaigns targeting visitors at all stages of their customer journey, from discovery, to planning, to booking."

Inclusive hospitality

Collaborations with Islamic organisations and personalised experiences could further enhance the appeal of South Africa as a diverse and inclusive destination. The growing interest from Saudi Arabia and the consistent rise in searches and bookings as the shoulder season moves into summer present a golden opportunity for the tourism industry to showcase South Africa's rich heritage and warm hospitality, ensuring every traveller feels welcomed and valued.

Fazal Behardeen, CEO of CrescentRating and HalalTrip, says: "According to the Mastercard-CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index 2023 report, South Africa has secured the seventh position among non-OCI destinations. The report reflects the country's diverse culture, traditions, and stunning landscapes, making it an attractive option for travellers seeking a mix of adventure and heritage.

"With the high season just around the corner, South Africa has a unique opportunity to showcase its hospitality and attract more travellers from around the world. By adopting inclusive marketing strategies and emphasising the country's unique offerings, South Africa can reinforce its position as a top destination for tourists from the Middle East and beyond."

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