

## 4 innovations to disrupt SA tourism in 2020

This month, multinational taxi service Uber presented a full-scale model of a flying car. The vehicle will form part of a fleet of Uber Air Taxis that will be flown by a pilot and will be able to accommodate four passengers each. Robots have become prevalent in some of the bigger hotel chains around the world, as well as in selected airports, and we can expect more robots to appear in 2020.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

However, even though these futuristic innovations in tourism are spectacular, the South African travel industry will see more far-reaching changes in 2020, according to Dr Nomvuselelo Songelwa, CEO of Jurni.



### Hyundai, Uber partner to develop Uber air taxis

8 Jan 2020



"Tourism has always been ahead of the curve when it comes to innovation. Tourism was one of the first sectors to digitalise business processes on a global scale. The tourism industry brought flight and hotel bookings online, and the sector became a digital pioneer," says Songelwa.

Songelwa explains that travellers today are always connected, constantly searching for information, continually sharing their experiences on social media and demanding that their needs are instantly gratified. As a result, tourism stakeholders in South Africa have had to keep their finger on the pulse, innovate and apply technology to enhance the traveller experience.

Songelwa points to the following innovations as primary disruptors in the South African tourism industry in 2020:

### 1. Facial recognition enables a frictionless travel experience

Airports around the world are introducing biometric technology and facial recognition to identify travellers and make their trip as frictionless as possible.

In selected airports, travellers can check-in remotely using their smartphone and an enrolment app. The facial recognition technology includes a liveness check, allowing travellers to validate who they are with a few movements of their head. Thanks to this, travellers can enjoy a seamless journey the moment they set foot in the airport.

Facial recognition systems are also on the cards for South Africa, according to digital security company, Gemalto.

## 2. Tech connects travellers with more – and often unexpected – experiences

Travellers today use their mobile phones to control every aspect of their lives and travels. They check flight schedules, route options and keep up-to-date with possible delays. In 2020, we can expect them to take it one step further.

Six in 10 travellers have indicated they want technology to offer them a 'wild card' option during their holidays, by introducing them to something new or unexpected during their travels. This is according to research by Booking.com, which polled 22,000 travellers across 29 markets around the globe.

Almost half (46%) of travellers admitted to using an app to facilitate booking hotels and trips in real-time while travelling, while 44% are planning to use an app that allows them to pre-plan activities.



### Pilot phase of new tourism booking tool kicks off

9 Dec 2019



"This new trend presents huge opportunities for the undiscovered tourism SMMEs in South Africa," says Dr Songelwa. "Jurni recently introduced a booking tool that empowers tourism products, including smaller and rural tourism SMMEs, to connect with customers worldwide, providing them with an online channel that allows travellers to search for, find and book tourism product across the country. By giving smaller, hidden, tourism attractions a platform to be seen, they will be able to compete on a more global scale and attract the attention of consumers around the world."

## 3. Data-driven intelligence will help uncover new destinations

First-time travellers to South Africa tend to visit tried-and-tested destinations like Cape Town and the Kruger National Park, but the country has a rich vein of sights, experiences and hidden gems, with much more on offer than Table Mountain and the Big Five.

In 2020, data intelligence will become a crucial element to drive tourism to the lesser-known destinations of our country. The padstals of Kakamas and the incredible nature hikes found near Hogsback could attract numerous travellers, but without a record of current visits, they are overlooked by tour operators, travel planners and even tourism investors.

"Official statistics so far have been one-dimensional and focus solely on total international arrivals. Car rental companies, hotels and various booking engines and platforms have been analysing their data to create visitor profiles. They gauge

average length of stay, hotel nights and ordinary travel spend. But this valuable data is being collected in silos.

"There is currently no clear 'overall' indication of source markets, traveller behaviour, or indeed investment opportunities in promising regions of the country. Technological tools aim to address these challenges by consolidating the existing data sources and plugging any data gaps by creating new data platforms," says Songelwa.

#### **4. New and innovative jobs for an ambitious Gen Z**

Travel agents. Tour operators. Chefs. Game rangers. These are typically the careers that are associated with the travel and tourism industry. However, as the industry increasingly embraces technological innovation and data analytics, many exciting high-tech jobs are starting to emerge – a perfect fit for Generation Z, who are predicted to become the biggest consumer market this year.

"South Africa's travel and tourism industry could benefit significantly from Gen Z's tech literacy to create and maintain a digital presence. This generation can help the travel industry in South Africa, from sophisticated travel companies in Johannesburg to small rural B&Bs in Mpumalanga, leap into the digital realm," says Songelwa. "Equally, the travel and tourism industry offers young professionals exciting opportunities, from data analytics to virtual reality and even robotics."

"Twenty-twenty promises to be an exciting year for tourism and technology in South Africa, as tourism has been recognised as a critical tool for creating much-needed employment and economic stability," concludes Songelwa.

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