

SA Tourism, TBCSA launch global PR communications Tourism Advocacy Programme

In a bid to reposition South Africa as a Covid-19 safe destination and change damaging narratives currently associated with South Africa, South African Tourism (SA Tourism) and the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA), are launching a Global PR communications Tourism Advocacy Programme, which forms part of the recent 'Tourism Road To Recovery Plan', adopted by national government and the tourism sector.



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Over the years, South Africa as a tourism destination enjoyed positive competitive brand strength in key source markets globally and within its target traveller segments and trade partners.



Tourism Recovery Plan to facilitate preservation of R189bn

23 Apr 2021



Like most major tourism destinations, South Africa has also had adverse perceptions pertaining to safety and security, visa issuance and direct airlift but the destination allure overshadowed these as evidenced by the increasing tourism arrivals year on year.

In March 2020, the world went into a global travel shutdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, there has been a gradual isolation of South Africa from a travel standpoint.

This isolation is evident in the following ways:

- Travel bans of South Africans travelling to global destinations;
- Adverse travel advisories: governments advising their citizens not to travel to South Africa;
- Adverse global media reports labelling South Africa as unsafe, from a COVID-19 standpoint; and
- The intensification of adverse reporting around the B.1.351 variant which has been inaccurately dubbed the 'South African Covid-19 variant'.

The above is in spite of positive efforts, achievements and globally acclaimed accolades of how the South African government and citizens have managed the destination through the pandemic.

In December 2020, South Africa's top adviser on Covid-19, Professor Salim Abdool Karim, and his counterpart in the United States, Dr Anthony Fauci, were jointly awarded the John Maddox Prize for 'standing up for science' during the Covid-19 pandemic. The John Maddox Prize recognises the work of people around the world who promote science on a matter of public interest, facing difficulty or hostility in doing so.

"South Africa, like many other countries, is seeking ways to rebuild its tourism sector and economic contribution," says Sthembiso Dlamini, SA Tourism's acting CEO.

"It is for this reason that South African Tourism is taking this as a unique opportunity to reposition South Africa (the brand) to the rest of the world by developing and implementing a global advocacy programme with the aim to re-ignite the South African brand, particularly at the back of the damage caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the inaccurate labelling of the B.1.351 variant."

"The persisting negative global narrative in the Red List casts SA in a negative light in terms of how the country is handling the pandemic, and this has a negative effect on tourism attractiveness. This partnership between TBCSA and SA Tourism and the consequent global advocacy programme will assist in cementing the tourism recovery plan and will, as a result, revive the tourism sector," says Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa, TBCSA CEO.

A comprehensive approach

Firstly, across all key source markets, the programme will focus on the causal issues for adverse travel positioning in each source market ranging from policy, trade, commercial, media, influential voices and social media dynamics.

Secondly, from a South Africa Inc. standpoint, the programme will address issues around messaging cohesion, dynamism, responsiveness, issue management and immediacy of crisis response protocols in tourism.

Thirdly, the programme will critically assess the supply-side visitor experience dynamics leveraging positivity and highlighting the gaps that the tourism sector may need to address in order to meet demand when markets mutually reopen with South Africa.

Lastly, there has been much innovation during the travel lockdown in the tourism sector. New experiences and products have developed, which the world tourism markets may not be aware of.

This programme seeks to find market access channels for these new products and experiences as part of projecting a confident proposition to the world.

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