

Wesgro report forecasts Western Cape as global adventure tourism hub by 2032

According to a recent report from Wesgro, the official tourism, trade, and investment promotion agency for Cape Town and the Western Cape province, the region is poised to emerge as a global hub for adventure tourism, a niche within the sector.



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Adventure tourism, as defined by the Adventure Travel Trade Association, involves trips with at least two of the following elements: physical activity, natural environment, and cultural immersion. This burgeoning niche divides activities into "hard" and "soft" categories. "Hard activities" attract thrill-seekers seeking greater challenges, such as water adventures, caving, climbing, and skydiving. Conversely, "soft activities" encompass safe and easy-to-learn pursuits like hiking or cycling.

The Wesgro study, *Adventure Tourism: Market Potential in South Africa and the Western Cape*, conducted by Wesgro, draws upon data from a recent report by Allied Market Research. According to the global market intelligence provider, the adventure tourism market was valued at \$366.7bn globally in 2022, with projections indicating a substantial rise to \$4.6t by 2032. This growth is attributed to the increasing demand for adventure experiences worldwide. While the precise size of the local adventure tourism market remains unquantified, it's evident that it's on the rise, especially considering the recent surge in global interest in adventure activities.

Rapid growth

Recent data from South African Tourism, published in 2023, highlights a shift in consumer preferences towards "real-time" experiences over material acquisitions while traveling. Adventure tourism stands out as a rapidly growing market in SA, with a unique focus on sustainability, conservation, and environmental protection. This aligns with the global trend where tourists prefer destinations emphasising these values while offering outdoor, nature, scenic beauty, and adrenaline experiences. Wesgro's report points out the rapid growth of adventure tourism in South Africa, along with a growing recognition among industry stakeholders of its economic value.

Tailor-made adventure experiences have the potential to catalyse the entire tourism sector, a significant job generator contributing 5%-6% to the GDP in the past decade. Before the pandemic disrupted the travel landscape, tourism was a vital lifeline, supporting over 1.5 million jobs nationwide, constituting 9.2% of total employment.

The Wesgro report underlines the Western Cape's ideal positioning in the adventure tourism market, attributing it to the region's growing emphasis on sustainability and the promotion of harmony between humans and nature. In terms of source markets, Europe led the pack in 2022, comprising 63.7% of tourists enjoying adventure experiences in SA, followed by North America (16.2%) and Africa (11.3%). The Western Cape stood out as the preferred destination for 47.4% of tourists visiting SA who listed adventure activities among their top choices, ranking fourth after eating out, shopping, and beach experiences.

Notably, adventure tourism has the power to deepen regional spread and extend the length of stay, as many adventure activities are found in the wide-open spaces of the province.

Tailored adventures

Wrenelle Stander, Wesgro CEO, emphasises the need for a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing tourists' decisions to partake in adventure tourism experiences. By identifying these aspects, operators can develop tailored adventures catering to the specific needs of their target audience.

Standar also pointed out the importance of aligning marketing strategies with tourists' preferences. For instance, Europeans highly value creativity, recognising it as a key driver of innovation and growth, offering an opportunity for marketing experiences that resonate with these values.

Mireille Wenger, provincial minister of Finance and Economic Opportunities, states: "Our majestic Western Cape, a cradle of scenic beauty and adrenaline-pumping activities, stands at the forefront of adventure tourism. With the global adventure tourism market poised for unprecedented growth, from \$366.7bn in 2022 to an estimated \$4.6t by 2032, the time is now to embrace these economic opportunities."

"As we welcome tourists from across the globe, drawn by their desire for authentic, 'real-time' experiences, we will continue to work with all industry stakeholders to ensure that adventure tourism remains a beacon of high-value, sustainable travel. We know that more tourists mean more jobs, and there's no time like the present to propel the Western Cape and South Africa into a new era of economic prosperity," concludes Wenger.