

Fast, free Wi-Fi key to Namibian tourist experience

Namibia is known globally as a top ecotourism destination and it's a sector that is growing with a 5% year-on-year increase in international traffic into Namibia. After mining, tourism is the second largest sector contributing to the Namibian GDP with 20% of formal employment directly related to the tourism sector, ensuring a top quality tourist experience is key to sustaining and enhancing the tourism sector.



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Connectivity is integral to the whole travel process from pre-trip planning and booking, to check-in processes and online access at the departing airport, and even during the flight as more airlines are beginning to offer Wi-Fi mid-air, to connectivity requirements at the hotel destination and of course the post-holiday experience of sharing holiday snaps with friends and family; although the post-holiday sharing is happening more often at the actual holiday destination thus increasing connectivity requirements at hotel destinations for photo sharing, video Skype calls and more.

“Free Wi-Fi is the most cited hotel amenity request in multiple surveys across the world whereby lack of it is considered a deal-breaker whereby they’d look for an alternative hotel. Latest tourism statistics indicate that German tourists stay on average 19-25 days in the country. These tourists have high expectations of connectivity in terms of service speed, quality, overall experience and typically for the service to be free at their hotel. This means hotels and the hospitality industry need to invest more in ICT to match the guest expectation and overall experience,” says Marc Gregan, general manager, AfricaOnline Namibia.

Hotels should focus on Wi-Fi as a valued guest amenity rather than an extension of a hotel's IT operation. This may mean an investment in IT support staff for out of hours troubleshooting and extending or improving its coverage to requested guest areas. The hospitality sector is a 24/7 service orientated business and the provision of Wi-Fi is no different, yet often the service staff lacks the requisite skills. Hotels need to assess how much bandwidth capacity is required for a typical guest usage pattern of its holiday makers or business travellers, taking into account that the average traveller will have three Wi-Fi-enabled devices and may use all of them during peak periods.

“Hotels can also consider adopting a new trend for a hybrid model of basic free Wi-Fi for all guests to enable access to email and browsing, and a premium or tiered paying model for faster speed requirements and video downloads,” notes Gregan. This also highlights that managing and monitoring the hotel guest Wi-Fi is a definite necessity to ensure consistency in service delivery and eliminating any potential abuse. Even basic monitoring by MAC address duration on the network will help eliminate non-guest usage where access password to a free Wi-Fi service is being used by unauthorised users.

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