

Finding purpose and wellbeing through travel

 By [Mariette du Toit-Helmbold](#)

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2020: The year nobody could predict. The year our lives ground to a simultaneous halt. The year we were forced to face ourselves.

Despite the large-scale havoc the coronavirus has left in its wake and continues to wreak as second waves of infection rise up around the globe, it has given humanity a rare opportunity for communal reflection.



Mariette du Toit-Helmbold

As we found ourselves hunkering down at home for much of the past year with no real clear view of how this will play out, we've been forced to reassess our lives – the things and people we value, where we spend our money, why we do what we do, and, perhaps most poignant of all, how this could be forever changed.

“ For those of us who work in travel and tourism and value gaining new experiences in far-flung corners of the world, this has been a particularly painful time of reflection. Because, the truth is, it will never be the same. ”

So what will travel look like in 2021 and going forward? Nobody really knows.

A year ago, I was writing a very different travel forecast with continued growth for the global tourism industry anticipated. Fast forward a year, we are facing a growing health crisis and a return to Level 3 restrictions with fears of even tighter controls if the infection rate does not improve soon.



Preparing for a post-Covid-19 era in the tourism industry

Mariette du Toit-Helmbold 25 Mar 2020



Reports indicate that there is a growing desire to travel after months of hard lockdown with remote destinations and private safaris in high demand. For the majority of international travellers from our key source markets, escaping winter and hard lockdown is however not an option, leaving South Africa's tourism sector vulnerable to further business closures and job losses. Domestic tourism was also dealt a heavy blow with the recent Level 3 restrictions and closure of beaches that put a serious damper on people's Christmas holiday plans.

Nobody knows how the virus and new strains will behave over the coming months and it will take some time before vaccines will have a real impact.



Vaccines may soon make travel possible again. But how quickly will it return - and will it be forever changed?

Joseph M. Cheer, Colin Michael Hall, Jarkko Saarinen 29 Dec 2020



One is understandably hesitant to make any confident predictions apart from the most obvious one being that 2021 will most likely continue to be a very difficult year for the global travel and tourism sector.

But if there's one thing I know for sure, it is that the yearning for 'elsewhere', for 'discovery', for being forever changed by an encounter with people and place is so deeply ingrained in the human psyche that travel will never die.

I love how Skyscanner recently expressed this in its 'The New World of Travel' report:

“ Travel is a celebration of difference. It fosters a greater understanding of the world and its diversity. Countless academics have commented on the way travel expands minds and shapes a more curious, tolerant outlook. ”

With recent global political developments and social movements, it is safe to say that we all need a more tolerant outlook and a greater understanding of what makes each of us so uniquely different. I can't imagine anything more dreadful than having to live in a world where we all think, look and act the same.

I am who I am because I have seen and experienced a world beyond my own.

If I had to highlight a few travel trends for the coming year and beyond, these would stand out:

Purpose-driven travel

Whether purchasing a product or picking a next travel destination, the question more and more consumers tend to ask is 'how will this add meaning to my life?', but also 'how will buying this product/choosing this destination add value/meaning to the lives of those who made it/live there?'

While we've seen this trend develop over the past few years, it's really coming into its own now as wise-beyond-their-years, earth-conscious and socially woke Gen Z-ers come of age.



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Furthermore, rapid implementation of travel restrictions and border closures in response to the coronavirus pandemic has shown older generations of travellers that the world may no longer be their oyster. We are painfully aware of our impact on the world and how connected and dependent we all are on each other. And, when planning our next break – whether local or abroad – it best be ‘the trip of a lifetime’... just in case.

It is for this reason that we will see a lot more thought going into the planning of holidays and trips, a greater consciousness and purpose-driven approach to travel.

Domestic travel

Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on most pockets and a general uncertainty over the health and safety of air travel and possibly falling ill while abroad is making people wary of embarking on international travel.

Although South Africa's borders are open once again, domestic travel is not the silver bullet many had hoped it would be. The second wave of infections and subsequent restrictions have made local travellers hesitant to head out with many of them cancelling their much anticipated Christmas holidays and beach breaks.

The fact remains that the South African tourism industry cannot survive off domestic travel alone, but it is most likely that those in the higher LSMs will use the opportunity to spend more on luxury local travel, which would normally be the stomping ground of international travellers.

The good old-fashioned road trip and more mini-breaks closer to home over weekends will gain popularity, which will result in a much-needed boost in local tourism for rural areas and small towns.



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A rise in spontaneous, last-minute trips

One of the somewhat more surprising effects the coronavirus pandemic has had on some travellers is a tendency towards impulsivity.

Where booking and planning holidays well in advance is standard practice for most travellers, a general feeling of not really knowing what nasty surprises a month from now could hold – let alone a year – has led to a much more compressed booking and planning period.

In its 'New World of Travel' Report, Skyscanner noted that following hard lockdown in most European countries as well as the US, there was a marked rise in searches to book travel departing within a week or a month.

This, in turn, is forcing the industry to adapt to become more flexible and customer-centric, adjusting booking and cancellations terms and conditions.

We can expect to see the same trend – especially among younger travellers – in South Africa over the coming months.



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It's an extended family affair

Intergenerational travel remains a popular trend.

Even more so in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic where we haven't been able to spend time with one another. Many travellers are going to choose to kill two birds with one stone by inviting grandparents, siblings and close friends to join them on intimate vacations creating safe travel bubbles.

It would be prudent for the hospitality industry to factor this into their planning, ensuring that they are truly family-friendly

and can offer families the kind of experiences we all crave after one of the most difficult years in recent memory.

Steering clear of crowds

As the second wave of coronavirus infections threatens to destroy what is left of our fragile healthcare and tourism sector, crowd control remains firmly in place at major attractions.

Apart from this, people will also tend to steer clear of indoor spaces that could quickly become crowded and opt instead for outdoor areas where social distancing can easily be maintained.

Rural regions and small towns should respond with well-curated and enticing travel packages that speak to the needs of travellers, eager to explore and get away, but not willing to risk their safety. With beaches, rivers and dams closed, destinations must work hard on promoting the less-obvious, but equally beautiful and enjoyable attractions and activities on offer. It is time to get creative and develop new experiences for travel-hungry locals.



Taking the office on the road

Where working remotely was once something only digital nomads could do, 2020 has levelled the playing field.

As more people find themselves working from home, those who were formerly office-bound may find themselves opting for more mid-week breaks, laptops in tow.

Wellness is the new wealth

Finally, the pandemic and subsequent lockdown have taken its toll on our mental health. Human beings are not designed for isolation and withstanding the kind of stress we have all had to endure for months on end.

The global wellness movement has grown exponentially over the last few years. This, in turn, has stimulated demand for a more mindful, conscious and slower way of travelling. Wellness tourism was a \$639bn market in 2017, projected to reach \$919bn by 2022. Before Covid-19, wellness tourism was growing by 6,5% annually, twice as fast as leisure tourism based on Euromonitor data.

As travelling resumes, health and wellbeing-focused trips and retreats are poised to be in high demand. These include new and unusual wellness trips like wellness mumcations (reconnecting with self without kids and partners), painmoons (trips to get over loss or heartache), fertility trips and divorce retreats.

“ My prediction is that this segment of tourism will continue to outperform other segments as we learn to live with a pandemic, more conscious of our impact on the world and each other, and people embark on soul-searching retreats, slow journeys and life-enriching encounters in nature. ”

Remote destinations and places with a lower Covid-19 risk will be popular, whether it's for a healthy break to de-stress or an active holiday to boost physical wellbeing in the scenic beauty of South Africa's countryside.



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Health and Fitness Travel says that immune-boosting retreats are offered in many locations for a secluded, social distancing friendly getaway to focus on personal well-being. Weight loss programmes, fitness classes, specialised treatments and sunnier climates are all married together to aid your body's natural defences.

It goes on to explain that self-care, a necessity during lockdown, is now becoming a driving factor in holiday planning. The threat of serious illness was a powerful motivator for many to focus on their own health and fitness. Many had to learn the art of self-care during lockdown, whether that's healthy eating or regular exercise, and now have a desire to turn that wellness project into a lifestyle that includes the way we travel.

ABOUT MARIETTE DU TOIT-HELMBOLD

Mariette du Toit-Helmbold is an international destination marketing and tourism thought leader, as well as a writer and public speaker on tourism, responsible tourism, destination marketing, brand innovation and digital strategy. She established Destinate, an international specialised destination and tourism marketing agency, after an enviable tenure of 10 years as the CEO of Cape Town Tourism.

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