

Why SA Tourism invited over 840 of the most influential travellers to #ShareSouthAfrica

By [Bronwen Auret](#)

27 Sep 2022

Perspective is everything. That's possibly one of the biggest lessons we've learnt in the past two-and-half years. Perspective; be it in the sense of how precious life is, or how valuable our liberties, social relations and freedom of movement really are, or even how quickly it can all be gone or taken away by some out-of-our-control fluke. Perspective; the ability to assess and appreciate from multiple angles, the moment one is living through, as well as see all its pitfalls, opportunities and ways out.



Image source: Taryn Elliott from [Pexels](#)

Perspective is also about the angle of approach; the side of things we get to (or choose to) see. Take for example, the world-famous Three Rondavels in Mpumalanga, South Africa. The elevated view-point along the Panorama route is arguably, and rightly, the route's most photographed and iconic angle. From this angle it is the definition of breath-taking splendour.

By boat from down-below the Blyde River canyon, while navigating the serene waters of the Blydepoort dam, will leave you awed by the same three imposing round-shaped and dome-topped peaks, dwarfing you and your surrounds, in a most majestic manner. Same geological wonder, different perspectives.

South African Tourism's response to wanderlust

Appreciating perspective of our travellers - domestic, regional and international - has become something of an obsession for those of us honoured with the task of polishing the crown jewels of South Africa's tourism and showcasing them to the world.

We are increasingly observing that for many travellers around the world, wanderlust has taken on a deeply spiritual, reflective, recharge-and-renewal-seeking, infinitely deeper meaning in the emerging new 'post-pandemic' world. In response to this we are activating our core audiences through understanding what moves our travellers, not only asking them to visit BUT bringing them to visit through South Africa's ambitious MegaFam hosting.

Inspiring a sector to 'Live Again'

Our ambitious 'Live Again' campaign was born in February this year, at a time when the future of travel and tourism was on a slightly better footing than the preceding two years, but still far from certain and secure.



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Our global marketing campaign, twinned with our country's first global television advertisement in five years served to complement our 'Live Again' brand promise, and amplify our message that we are the ultimate destination to re-energise body, mind and spirit.

Months later, with all the ingredients mentioned above mixed in and left to set and simmer, it is quite gratifying to see that it is all beginning to come together. Even factoring in the lag effect of the travel bans imposed late last year, by some countries on South Africa and other countries in our neighbourhood, the number of passports being stamped-in at our immigration counters is trending up well. With the figures from Stats SA and analysis of Home Affairs data, by June this year, we had received nearly 2.28 million international visitors, well on track to matching and surpassing last year's full-year total of just over 2.3 million.

This reality is, pleasingly, also beginning to be noticed by key players in sectors such as aviation. Air Belgium's introduction, this month, of a direct flight twice a week between Brussels, Johannesburg and Cape Town is the latest evidence of the smart money flowing (or in this case 'flying') to a destination that just makes sense. Importantly for us, this so-called 'triangular flight' (between three cities) plugs us directly to the heart of Europe, a key source-market for leisure and business travel into our country.

Along with moves such as the Qatar Airways – SA Airlink cooperation agreement reached a few months ago, we consider these developments to be early signs of vindication of the decisions we have taken in the past year, around putting our country out there in the world, more boldly.

SA's great MegaFam - bringing travellers to South Africa

It's time to make South Africa the object of pining and longing in hearts and minds across continents, time-zones, latitude and longitudinal lines. It's time to insert our beautiful country's name into conversations had in any language from KiSwahili to Espanyol, Mandarin to Urdu, Yoruba to Portuguese and everything in between.



SA Tourism launches global MegaFam project

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And that is precisely what we are setting out to achieve with the bold next phase of our post-pandemic tourism recovery and growth strategy, anchored on the concept of familiarisation ('Fam', as it's known in industry parlance). It's one thing to think of familiarisation in clinical, sterile destination-marketing jargon. It's quite another to do what we're preparing to do, which is something arguably beyond familiarisation. Hence, we have had to dub it a 'MegaFam', to try and truly capture the scope, scale, unique character and ambition of the effort. Broken down to its essentials, this phase of our global campaign will see us invite over 840 people from varied backgrounds, professions, and social standing to come and 'taste' for themselves, 'the pudding' we have been mixing up with our tourism offerings. If seeing is believing, as the old adage tells us, then our Megafam is about seeing, feeling and being transformed from the inside out, such that our visitors will not be able to keep quiet, but will want to tweet it loud, Instagram it boldly, blog it boisterously and, of course, for those in the tourism booking

business: 'sell it' (as that old ad would say)!

Destination marketing is half the equation. Ubuntu-infused hospitality the other half

Our MegaFam visitors have been carefully selected based on various considerations, not least of which is their service to humanity during the darkest hour of the pandemic, their strategic placement at the 'book now' end of the tourism value-chain in market countries we're hoping to grow, as well as their unique stories and story-telling abilities. After all, we as a country have, and have always had quite a story to tell, and if we can harness impactful voices to tell it, then we should. But that's just half the #MegaFam equation; the technical, marketing and strategy half. For the other half, we are counting on a currency we know we have in abundance; that unmatched South African hospitality, warmth, and spirit of Ubuntu.

That spirit, infused and flavoured as it is with our appreciation for diversity, which is in turn born out of our society's naturally heterogenous culture, means that the London-based, French/Greek couple we've invited, will feel right at home, united with us in our diversity. Stefan and Sebastien have travelled to over 80 countries around the world since they quit their jobs and started their epic romantic adventure, almost 10 years ago. So, you bet they've had quite a few experiences that must have wowed them. But we're confident none of these compare to the up-close and personal encounter they're about to have with the big five at the Kruger National Park, the chill sessions they're in for in Soweto, including at the famous Konkla, and the life-changing stay they will have at the sacred space that used to be our late founding President Nelson Mandela's primary residence in Houghton, the Sanctuary Mandela. When they can finally find the words to tell of these experiences in their influential gay travel blog, we just know there'll be quite a few readers' mouths left agape with wonder.



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We can almost picture the struggle the American travel writer behind the influential site blackgirlstraveltoo.com, Danny Rivers Mitchell will have putting to words the sensory whirlwind tour that will on one of the days see her feast her eyes on Dylan Lewis' awe-inspiring sculpture garden in Stellenbosch, before winding down with the palate-titillating aromas and flavours of the finest wines the Western Cape has to offer.

In essence then, this is our rallying cry, a final huddle and pep-talk among us as South Africans, before we fling the gates wide-open for an endless stream of visitors who will not only experience our country and our humanity, but are sure to let the world know about it.

Multiply these kinds of carefully-curated familiarisation experiences with the more than 800 people we're lining up in the coming months, and you get the picture of the kind of conversation they will start in their spheres of influence around the globe. We see this as a unique opportunity for us as South Africans to shape the conversation about our country and us as a people, even before the words form in the minds of, and proceed through the lips, pens and keyboards of influential global conversation-leaders. Let's give them plenty of good things to say.

Investing in our country

Naturally, this undertaking will take an investment of resources to pull off. But it's an investment we must make, and make now. Surrendering our global lead-destination position is simply not an option. The fact that, pre-pandemic, we averaged 10 million international visitors a year shows we have prime destinations and experiences for which people around the world are willing to pay top-Rand.

Statistics at hand show that arrivals into South Africa continue to be dominated by visitors from our neighbourhood of Southern Africa; fraternal countries like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho and Malawi. But source-market countries from even further afield are also starting to re-engage, with arrivals from the United Kingdom already having surpassed 2021's full-year figure of some 45,000, and now tracking, and likely to exceed, 2020's figure of 132,000. Maybe 2019's 436,000 will be in sight soon. It's a trend observable for other countries such as the US and Germany.

We do this in the knowledge that every visitor waved on through at immigration at the airport, sea-port or land border is an opportunity for South Africans to showcase our unassailable humanity, generosity, kindness and warmth. But make no mistake, it's also an opportunity to restore the one in 10 jobs in the economy that at one stage were accounted for by the tourism sector, to add another Rand to the R209bn spent by tourists in our country in 2019, and for the sector to put shoulder to the wheel in reeling closer to realisation, the ambitious targets of the South Africa Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bronwen Auret is the Chief Quality Assurance Officer for South African Tourism

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