



Vision 2030, as set out in South Africa's National Development Plan, aims to eliminate poverty and create 11 million jobs by the year 2030. Given that the country's tourism industry employs more than 700 000 people (according to Stats SA), this means that domestic travel will become more significant in the coming years.

"The role of tourism is going to be even stronger than it was in the past – to the extent that we are called upon as practitioners in this sector to rise to that challenge and offer something that will drive transformation," says Jerry Mabena, CEO of Thebe Tourism Group. "It's important that we have something to offer, but for us to do this we need to know the markets that have not travelled and why."

Although 70% of the country's travel in 2015 was from black Africans, 82% of this was for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives. This is more than double the figure for other population groups, whose primary purpose for overnight trips is leisure, shopping and sport.

"The comparatives are startling," Mabena says. "There are a lot of opportunities in those spaces to develop what works for those markets. But the majority of people we're dealing with are considering travelling overseas before travelling in their own country. And that's because the outbound guys are doing a better job than we are from a domestic travel point of view. So it's a challenge to all of us to do more on a domestic travel front."

Part of the solution is to target Afropolitans, who are roughly synonymous with the emerging black middle class. But Mabena believes that definitions that focus on earnings are too narrow. (The World Bank and African Development Bank classify anyone who spends more than \$2 a day as middle class.) Instead, it's about understanding why a market that earns enough money to travel chooses to spend it elsewhere.

"Afropolitans are earning much more than \$2 a day, but we're not speaking to them because we're still coming up with a paradigm

based on the old way of thinking that the black middle class cannot afford to travel," he says. "It's bigger than income. It's about how people think: their lifestyle, their aspirations and what a black consumer wants in the marketplace."

Mabena uses the example of how common it is to find TV satellite dishes sprouting from shacks in townships across the country or the number of luxury cars parked outside Mzoli's – a popular restaurant in Gugulethu – on a Sunday afternoon. And while "black diamond" consumers are getting cosy with luxury products in fashion, travel and tourism are left out in the cold.

"The definition of the Afropolitan combines both qualitative and quantitative elements," Mabena says. "It brings the underlying drivers of aspirations into the fold in terms of how they drive needs and choices. These are the values tourism businesses need to understand. Unless we can tap into those aspirational values, we'll never know how to talk to the market."

In his research, Mabena has identified four groups of Afropolitans: forerunners (older consumers who lived through apartheid), born affluent (those who grew up in the suburbs or abroad and have returned "home"), shape-shifters (movers and shakers) and the *kasi*-certified (those who can afford to live in the suburbs, but choose to spend most of their time in the townships where they were born and raised). The goal is to expose them to new experiences that will break stereotypes and stretch their minds.

"People in this market need a reason to travel," he says. "And that reason could be anything. We just haven't communicated to them. So we need to do more to cater for this market. We need to have products that are designed around them. And we do need to find a way of bringing more of them into this particular space."

A key aspect is to make them feel safe, which is why Mabena emphasises travel packages that pick customers up at their homes, take them through what might be their first (potentially confusing) experience in an airport, get them to their destination and bring them back again. Another key aspect is charging them a single price to give them peace of mind. ➤

Encouraging domestic travel will give the South African economy a massive boost, writes Eugene Yiga

GETTING AFROPOLITANS TO TRAVEL



“Certain brands are beginning to recognise this market and are beginning to do things that are interesting in this particular space,” he says. “We’re working on an exciting project that we hope to launch soon around what we call Travel Aficionado, which talks to this market and gives them a high-end product they deserve.”

Looking ahead, the United Nations World Trade Organisation predicts that there will be almost 300 million international youth trips per year by 2020. This matters because Africa has the youngest population in the world. Indeed, with about 10 million young Africans entering the labour market each year, according to the Ernst & Young *Africa Report*, there’s a growth in potential customers that travel brands can speak to.

“The traditional way of looking at the tourism value chain involves travel agent, transport company (to take them to the destination), hotel or restaurant, site operator or cultural group and transport company (to take them home again),” says Jacques Du Bruyn, Managing Director of Flume Digital Marketing (www.flume.co.za). “But with the youth and the way they look at the Internet, it’s more interconnected.”

As the value chain becomes a value web, every touchpoint is an opportunity to communicate something valuable. More than that, Du Bruyn believes that the best way to market to non-travellers is to connect travel to their aspirations. “We have to showcase a new type of African,” he says. “That comes down to understanding the target

audience and knowing what ambitions they’ve got.”

Appealing to these aspirations doesn’t have to be expensive if travel brands know who they are and what they have to offer. Indeed, given that young travellers tend to be more willing to try new things (such as travelling with their children), they’re more likely to spend money for a memorable luxe experience compared with previous generations.

“A lot of destinations don’t know who they are,” says Anthony Berklich, creator of Inspired Citizen Media (www.inspiredcitizen.com), a New York-based luxury travel platform and blog. “They market surface things instead of getting to the nitty-gritty. For example, if your destination sees rain six months of the year, don’t discount that season. Use it and

create experiences that have to do with rain or getting wet or whatever is special or interesting that makes you unique. That will speak to a younger traveller who’s adventurous by nature and will come during the rainy season.”

Berklich also encourages travel brands to offer experiences that guests can’t find anywhere else and to train staff to make young travellers feel as though an experience was created just for them. It’s also helpful to think of small things like a local farewell gift they can photograph and share online. This can open up an ongoing dialogue for brands to continue engaging with guests after they’ve left, which can encourage them (or their family and friends) to visit in the future. 🌈

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