

STARS, STORIES, AND SUSTAINABILITY: UNLOCKING ASTRO TOURISM IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Long before the term “Astro Tourism” entered the global travel lexicon, African communities had been reading the stars, mapping the skies, and using celestial knowledge to guide agriculture, rituals, and movement. Today, that deep-rooted relationship between humanity and the cosmos is being reawakened, this time as a powerful lever for tourism, education, and sustainable economic growth.

At a standout session held on Day 3 of Africa’s Travel Indaba, a diverse panel of scientists, tourism experts, and government officials unpacked the untapped potential of Astro Tourism, also known as ‘dark sky tourism’, as a uniquely African offer to the world.

Moderated by Dr Laetitia Jacob, the session brought together Dr Kenneth Hlela, Managing Director of Gemini Destination Advisory & Consulting; Dr Sisco Auala, Senior Researcher at Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST); Audrey Dikgale, Deputy Director for Multiwavelength Astronomy at the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation; and Johann van Schalkwyk, Director of Tourism Development at the Northern Cape’s Department of Economic Development and Tourism.

“Astro Tourism is not new to us. Our ancestors were the first astronomers,” said Dr Sisco Auala, pointing to Namibia’s indigenous Himba people who still use the stars to predict weather and track time. “We must stop treating our knowledge as folklore. The sky is a heritage space, and dark skies are part of that heritage. This isn’t just storytelling, it’s knowledge that has value, and it must be protected and commercialised responsibly.”

With the theme for Indaba 2025 being “Unlimited Africa”, Dr Auala said astro tourism offers a practical response to that call: “It challenges us to reimagine how we package tourism and our heritage. It’s time to move beyond entertainment and use tourism as a vehicle for education, pride, and sustainable development.”

Indeed, Namibia and South Africa are at the centre of global astronomical exploration. The Northern Cape, in particular, is home to some of the world’s most significant infrastructure: the Southern African Large Telescope (SALT), the largest optical telescope in the southern hemisphere, and MeerKAT, a precursor to the



Square Kilometre Array (SKA), one of the world’s largest and most ambitious radio telescope projects. These facilities sit under some of the clearest and darkest skies on Earth.

“Our slogan in the Northern Cape is ‘Nowhere Else on Earth’, and we mean it,” said Johann van Schalkwyk. “We sit right in the middle of the Milky Way. On a moonless night, the starlight is bright enough to see your way. The Khoi used these stars to guide their seasons, their crops, their journeys. That legacy continues today.”

But Astro Tourism is not just about infrastructure and stargazing. It is about community involvement, education, and a shift in how the sector views value creation.

“We have a knowledge mine ready to be mined,” said Dr Auala, ‘but it must be mined ethically, with communities as co-creators. It’s not just about tourists coming to see us dance. It’s about knowledge centres, learning spaces, and recognising that we hold something valuable.’

Dr Hlela added a business lens to the discussion: “Tourists today are conscious of how their money benefits communities. That’s where ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles come in. Communities must see themselves as businesses, understand their value, and actively shape what can be commercialised. Government must invest in infrastructure that enables this kind of tourism, and private companies will follow.”

Dikgale brought in a critical scientific perspective: “We’re not talking astrology, we’re talking astronomy, the

science of understanding the universe. But even science must be protected. Light pollution is a growing threat to dark sky tourism. We’re working with stakeholders to educate the public on how excess lighting interferes with astronomical observation. Our skies are a resource, and we must preserve them.”

She also highlighted the socio-economic potential: “We now have more than 300 astronomers and growing opportunities for youth in data science, tech, and trade, all linked to astronomy. This is part of our drive to make South Africa and Africa globally competitive in space sciences.”

Importantly, Astro Tourism is a regional opportunity. The Tropic of Capricorn runs through only four African countries, South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, and Mozambique, creating exclusive opportunities for stargazing experiences tied to geography, science, and indigenous heritage.

“We already have an Astro Tourism strategy in place,” said Van Schalkwyk, ‘and we’re implementing it, working with SANParks and the tourism value chain to create routes, train unemployed youth, and align with SANBI and South African Tourism.’

As one of the audience members aptly summed up the discussion: “Africa is the cradle of humankind, and also the cradle of astronomy. The world is looking to us, and we must respond not just with beauty, but with value. Let’s do tourism differently, tourism that educates, inspires, and uplifts.”

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UNLOCKING SOUTH AFRICA'S APPEAL TO YOUNG TRAVELLERS



South Africa's youth make up the majority of the population, and the future of the country's tourism sector. But for the country to realise its full potential as a travel destination and industry leader, young people must be engaged today not just as consumers, but as creators, contributors, and catalysts for growth.

This was the focus of a powerful editorial session on Day 3 of Africa's Travel Indaba titled "Youth Tourism and Backpacking: Unlocking SA's Appeal to Young Travellers." The session explored the questions: How can we make travel more relevant, accessible, and exciting for the next generation? And beyond just encouraging them to travel, how do we prepare them to lead in the future of tourism, by linking travel to sustainability, innovation, and storytelling?

Moderated by broadcaster and tourism advocate Zama Khumalo, the discussion brought together a panel of change-makers deeply invested in youth development. Their message was unanimous: youth are already hungry to explore, to lead, and to build a tourism sector that speaks to their realities. What they need is opportunity, visibility, and support.

The session echoed a clear message: "The youth are not useless, they are used-less," declared Sanele Zulu, CEO of the Green Youth Network. "If it is to be, it is up to me. We have to find solutions for the problems we have and start the change at home and in communities."

Zulu emphasised the value of creating intentional

platforms for young people to become active participants in shaping the future of travel, particularly through sustainability. "Young people can be ambassadors for a green future in tourism. We must link sustainability and tourism, create excitement around travel, and cultivate a culture of eco-consciousness, like Rwanda's car-free days."

Dabenhle Ntshangase, CEO of AirStudent, offered a bold view on reimagining affordability and access. "When I travelled to India, hostels were filled with Indian youth. In Bulgaria, it was Bulgarians exploring their own country. South African youth need a similar shift in mindset. We must build a culture where our kids want to see their own country."

Ntshangase started AirStudent to offer students affordable travel between home and school, and he believes more can be done by leveraging student numbers to negotiate deals with event organisers and transport providers. "Festivals are proof young people are willing to save and travel. We must work with organisers and the industry to make it happen."

As a digital native, Ntshangase also stressed the power of AI and social media. "Anyone can be a travel influencer now. Young people must find their niche and authentically tell the stories of where they come from. This is how we place South Africa on the global travel map."

For Sandile Cele, CEO of Volunteer and Travel, youth tourism is more than leisure, it's a gateway to purpose.

"We help young people, both local and international, use their skills to uplift communities. A volunteer with IT experience can teach coding in KwaMashu, and then attend a festival like Bushfire or Oppikoppi. We want to show that you can travel, learn, give back, and have fun, all at once." Cele emphasised the importance of exposure, encouraging gap years, summer work programmes, and NPO-led initiatives to broaden the horizons of young people.

Zulu added that there is immense potential for youth to tap into new areas of opportunity like AI and green innovation. "We want youth to travel with consciousness. Our Green Movement Conference is one way we're building that culture across the continent."

However, the panel agreed that exposure must start early. "We need to get into schools and communities," urged Zulu. "Let's use formal and informal institutions to educate youth about their history, heritage, and the possibilities that tourism holds for their future."

As the Q&A session wrapped up, one sentiment echoed above all: the youth are not just tomorrow's travellers, they are today's innovators. With the right support, storytelling platforms, and inclusive policies, they can discover their own country, continent, and world with pride and purpose.

In the words of Zulu: "Youth don't need saving, they need space to create." And with tourism as the vehicle, South Africa and Africa as a whole, stand ready to fuel that journey.

TRUSTED TOUR OPERATORS SCHEME: BUILDING A BRIDGE OF CONNECTION

The Department of Home Affairs launched the Trusted Tour Operators Scheme (TTOS) earlier this year - a collaborative initiative between South Africa, China, and India designed to streamline and fast-track visa applications for tourists booking through accredited tour operators.

As part of ongoing efforts to raise awareness and strengthen collaboration, Phindiwe Mbhele, Key Account Manager for TTOS at the Department of Home Affairs, hosted an information-sharing workshop during Africa's Travel Indaba. The session opened with a presentation to delegates from China and India, followed by a dynamic Q&A discussion addressing shared challenges and opportunities.

Having launched in early 2025, TTOS is still in its

foundational phase. The session focused on challenges faced by tour operators in both China and India regarding travel to South Africa and explored actionable solutions to address these obstacles.

Preliminary feedback from Chinese delegates suggests the scheme is off to a promising start, with over 10,000 Chinese tourists having travelled to South Africa under the TTOS umbrella since inception.

The workshop also examined the application process in more detail, particularly how to amend existing entries and resolve errors that may contribute to application rejections.

TTOS: A Cultural Experience

Ms Mbhele reaffirmed Home Affairs' commitment to making the travel process easier for visitors from China

and India. She also highlighted the broader vision of the scheme, which includes reciprocal travel opportunities for South Africans to experience cultural immersion in China and India, thereby deepening bilateral ties.

The session concluded on a high note, with delegates from all participating countries expressing strong support for the TTOS initiative. While acknowledging the challenges of the initial phase, there was a collective agreement on the importance of staying the course, working collaboratively, and continuing the journey to strengthen tourism links and cultural connections.

For more information about the Trusted Tour Operators Scheme, please visit the Department of Home Affairs Website: Home Affairs

LIMPOPO SHINES ON AFRICA'S BIGGEST TOURISM STAGE



Limpopo has once again proven on Africa's largest tourism platform that it is not only South Africa's leading domestic destination but also a powerhouse of innovation, resilience, and diversity.

At Africa's Travel Indaba 2025 this week, the province announced a significant development: the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Limpopo Tourism Agency (LTA) and the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). This agreement aims to enhance collaboration, share expertise, and jointly market the two provinces as a unified tourism destination.

Delivering his remarks at the signing ceremony on the Indaba trade floor, Limpopo MEC for Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Tshitereke Baldwin Matibe, celebrated the partnership as a milestone moment.

"Tourism knows no boundaries," he said. "This signing ceremony we witnessed today bears testimony to that. Travellers are often unaware of which province they're in when exploring cross-border areas such as Hoedspruit, Burgersfort, Roossenekal, and Groblersdal. What matters most is the experience." Matibe emphasised that the Kruger National Park is a prime example of shared tourism. "Over 70% of the park lies in Limpopo, yet many travellers enter through Mpumalanga gates and journey across both provinces seamlessly. This MoU acknowledges that our tourism offering is intertwined."

Joint marketing campaigns will give both provinces a stronger presence in international and domestic markets, while knowledge sharing will help improve destination management and product development. The two tourism agencies also aim to co-develop



itineraries that span both provinces, encouraging longer stays and increased visitor spend.

For small tourism businesses and rural communities, the collaboration offers opportunities for growth through increased visibility, joint capacity-building initiatives, and a more integrated tourism value chain.

SMMEs also benefited from the province's colourful, immersive pavilion at Indaba, with 54 proudly Limpopo-based tourism products on display.

"Our SMMEs are the backbone of our tourism industry," MEC Matibe emphasised, "and we are committed to supporting their growth and development."

Andrew Dipela, chairperson of the Limpopo Tourism Agency (LTA), said: "We're proud to offer our SMMEs the opportunity to network, learn, and build business relationships. These sessions are essential not just for exposure, but for developing real marketing and operational capacity."

Beyond promoting products, the LTA is focused on fostering mentorship and peer exchange. "What we're doing here is not just exhibiting," Dipela added. "We're cultivating knowledge. Our SMMEs get to learn from each other, observe how others deliver services, and take those lessons back home to improve their own operations."

With events such as the Limpopo Marula Festival and the upcoming 2025 National Tourism Career Expo on the horizon, the province is well-positioned to continue its upward trajectory.



THE GREATER GARDEN ROUTE: SA'S VIBRANT ROAD TO AUTHENTIC ADVENTURE

Discover a tapestry of authentic experiences to suit every traveller - no matter your age, writes Donna Denniss.

From Surf to Safari, Forest to Family:

The Garden Route Is More Than Just a Destination

The Garden Route is far more than just a scenic drive. Stretching along South Africa's southern coast, it is a living corridor of adventure, hospitality, conservation, and community spirit. From the wild forests of Tsitsikamma to the heights of Bloukrans Bridge, the surf of Jeffreys Bay, and the quiet heroism of rhino conservation, the Garden Route offers a tapestry of authentic experiences for every traveller-no matter their age, background, or purpose.

Adventure with Meaning: The Youthful Pulse of the Garden Route

Kai Sampson, the visionary behind Vibe Life, has witnessed the Garden Route's transformation from a humble backpackers' surf camp in Jeffreys Bay to a dynamic network of adventure and accommodation tailored for the young and the young-at-heart. His parents started the original surf camp nearly three decades ago, with the family handling everything from cooking to cleaning. Over the years, this small operation grew into Island Vibe, a brand now synonymous with youth travel experiences in South Africa.

But Kai's vision extends beyond surf and sand. Today, Vibe Life offers adventure tours, volunteering, and community engagement, empowering young travellers to explore South Africa meaningfully and affordably. "We look at putting together full gap years for people where they can mix touring with fun, social experiences, and friendships, while gaining perspective on life in South Africa and the world," Kai explains. By blending adventure with social connection and cultural immersion, the Garden Route becomes a launchpad for self-discovery and global awareness.

Homegrown Hospitality: The Heart of Jeffreys Bay

For Rhelda Foley, owner of On the Beach Guest House, the Garden Route is more than a business-it is a way of life. Her story began with family holidays from the Free State to Jeffreys Bay, eventually leading her to transform a private home into a welcoming guest house. "We love the location, we love Jeffreys, we love the whole vibe and the culture," she shares. Despite the town's growth, Jeffreys Bay retains its small-town charm and personal touch.

The guest house embodies this ethos: luxury with a homely feel. Guests can watch dolphins and whales from the patio, enjoy the honesty bar, and truly feel at home. "All our rooms are sea-facing and top class. It's a four-star guest house, but with a homely feel," says General Manager Belinda Smit. The guest house caters mostly to mature travellers seeking tranquillity, but they also offer child-friendly, self-catering apartments for families.

Misty Mountain Reserve: Stargazing, Forests, and Community

Deep in Tsitsikamma, Misty Mountain Reserve exemplifies how the Garden Route blends luxury, nature, and community. Marketing and Sales Manager Nicky Saayman describes the reserve as "a four-star reserve with a range of accommodation from ocean view lodges and tents to unique hives and stargazing domes." These domes, complete with private hot tubs and outdoor showers, offer guests a magical way to connect with the night sky and the surrounding forest.



Misty Mountain's commitment goes beyond beautiful accommodation. Their township tour, the first in the village, invites guests to walk with a local guide, enjoy high tea in a resident's home, share a meal at Cassie's corner, and visit the local crèche, where children sing for visitors. This initiative gives back to the community and offers guests an authentic taste of Tsitsikamma hospitality.

Education is another pillar at Misty Mountain. They have launched an online academy offering free courses in barista skills, front-of-house, and housekeeping, complete with certification. Every unit at the reserve is unique, and the focus is on creating experiences that are simple, beautiful, and meaningful.

Guardians of the Wild: Lombardini Game Farm and Rhino Conservation

For travellers seeking purpose, the Garden Route offers a front-row seat to conservation in action. At Lombardini Game Farm, Justin Terblanche-known as "The Rhino Whisperer"-has dedicated his life to protecting the region's last rhinos. "I have such a big passion for the animals, and I wanted to do more than just basic patrols. I decided to come and live in the bush with the rhinos. It took me a year and a half to gain their trust," Justin says. His bond with the rhinos is extraordinary. "I've learned how to walk and talk with them. They've accepted me as part of their group, which makes it easier to protect and



move them without stressful interventions." Lombardini's story is also one of resilience. After a devastating poaching incident, owner Susan Lottering faced a choice: abandon the rhinos or fight for their survival. "We decided to ensure they don't go extinct. We want our grandkids to know what a rhino is," Susan recalls.

Lombardini is more than a sanctuary-it is a welcoming destination with self-catering accommodation, destination weddings, and conferences. A new five-star lodge is underway, promising even more exciting developments for visitors seeking both adventure and purpose.

Adrenaline and Achievement: The Bloukrans Bungy

No journey along the Garden Route is complete without a brush with the extraordinary. Bloukrans Bridge is home to the world's highest bridge bungy jump at 216 meters, attracting thrill-seekers from around the globe. "We believe that fear is temporary, and regret is forever. People from all over the world come to jump and love the experience," says Thomas Ngomana, manager at Face Adrenalin.

For those seeking a different kind of thrill, the new SkyWalk Tour offers breathtaking views and a dash of adrenaline, suitable for groups, families, and solo adventurers. Safety is paramount: "We are proud of our safety record. There have been no incidents since the first jump in 1996, and we hold the Guinness World Record for the oldest Bungy Jumper, at 96 years," Thomas notes.

A Call to the Purposeful Traveller

The Garden Route is not a place to simply tick off a list, but a journey to be lived. It is for those who seek more than just a holiday: the purposeful traveller, the curious soul, the family, the solo wanderer, and the group of friends seeking connection. As Kai affirms, "Our mission is to showcase South Africa as the best place for young people to get that educational travel experience."

Whether you are drawn by the perfect wave, the call of the forest, the warmth of a guest house, the thrill of the world's highest bridge bungy, or the chance to witness rhino conservation, the Garden Route is vibrant, authentic, and ready to welcome you-no matter who you are or where your journey begins.

Come and discover the unexplored. The Garden Route is more than a destination-it is the road to the true spirit of South Africa.

UNLEASHING AFRICA'S TOURISM POTENTIAL

At the Africa Tourism Association (ATA), we are committed to advancing sustainable tourism to and within Africa. As Africa's tourism stakeholders convene at Africa's Travel Indaba, we are reminded of both the remarkable progress made and the systemic challenges that persist across the industry. Chief among these challenges are intra-continental connectivity and visa accessibility—two longstanding barriers that continue to impede growth across our sector. Addressing these issues is critical to unlocking the continent's full tourism potential. In parallel to addressing these barriers, ATA has identified three high-impact focus areas poised to drive long-term growth: meetings and events, technology and innovation, and diaspora engagement. Globally, the MICE sector is valued at over \$800 billion—and Africa claims just a fraction of that. ATA's Meet in Africa initiative is designed to spotlight Africa's capacity to host transformative experiences that blend business, culture, and community. Sports, in particular, offer a massive untapped opportunity. From South Africa hosting the Basketball Africa League Finals to Morocco set to co-host the 2030 FIFA World Cup, these events draw thousands of travelers—teams, fans, and media alike—while placing host cities in the global spotlight. Beyond ticket sales, sports tourism generates value across lodging, transportation, hospitality, retail, and content creation. Events are more than economic

drivers—they are storytelling platforms and nation-branding opportunities that attract high-value visitors, increase investment, and shape global perception.

The future of African tourism will also be shaped by tech-driven solutions—from digital visas and AI-powered itinerary planning to immersive storytelling and blockchain-based loyalty programs. There is an urgent need to support smart tourism development, elevate digital marketing capacity across SMEs, and foster platforms that encourage tech adoption at all levels. Innovation is not optional; it is the engine that will allow African destinations to compete globally while providing seamless, inclusive, and secure travel experiences.

We are most passionate about our engagement with the global African diaspora – an emotionally invested audience that brings influence, repeat visitation, and spending power. But engagement must be intentional. Africa's diaspora represents an untapped well of potential: not just as travelers, but as investors, storytellers, and connectors. Across North America, Europe, and the Caribbean, there is a growing hunger for meaningful connection to the continent. ATA's diaspora strategy centers around building trust, visibility, and access. We're curating content, building bridges with Black media platforms, elevating narratives that speak to a diverse diaspora, and facilitating meaningful partnerships that help destinations tap into this high-impact market. There is no tourism market more emotionally



NALEDI K. KHABO
CEO, AFRICA TOURISM ASSOCIATION

invested in Africa than the global African diaspora.

Africa's tourism growth will be defined not just by addressing its challenges, but by activating its opportunities. Meetings and events, technology, and diaspora engagement are not isolated strategies—they are interconnected pathways to inclusive development and global relevance.

YOUR SHOT TO SHOWCASE SOUTH AFRICA'S NATURAL BEAUTY – AND WIN!



South Africa is one of the most beautiful and biodiverse countries on Earth. That's why WWF South Africa is inviting everyone to play their part in a nationwide visual movement, Our Country, Through Your Lens – capturing the places, people, and wildlife that showcase our incredible natural heritage.

Local TV presenter, actor, and WWF South Africa board member, Masego 'Maps' Maponyane, is championing the movement. "We have fynbos found nowhere else. Wide, open spaces with unique plants and animals. Oceans teeming with life. Birds that soar above our cities and towns, and communities whose connection to nature runs deep. But none of it is guaranteed."

In a time of climate change and environmental loss, Our Country, Through Your Lens is a user-generated photo competition calling on South Africans – whether budding photographers or phone-snappers – to document South Africa's natural heritage and show why it is so important for us to take care of it.

"We choose to believe in better, not because we're naïve about the challenges, but because we know that better begins with belief," says WWF CEO Dr Morné du Plessis. "From restoring rivers in the Drakensberg's water source areas to growing black rhino populations and creating green jobs for youth across the country, our work shows that a better future isn't a fantasy, it's already happening." "This movement is about encouraging people to stop,

observe, and acknowledge what really matters in our day-to-day lives," he adds. "From a child planting a tree to the sun rising over the ocean, if it makes you believe in something better, take the shot and share it."

How to take part:

- Entries open: 12 May – 6 June 2025
- Enter by posting your photo as a comment on WWF South Africa's Facebook page or uploading it to Instagram or TikTok – tagging @WWFSouthAfrica and using #BelieveInBetter.

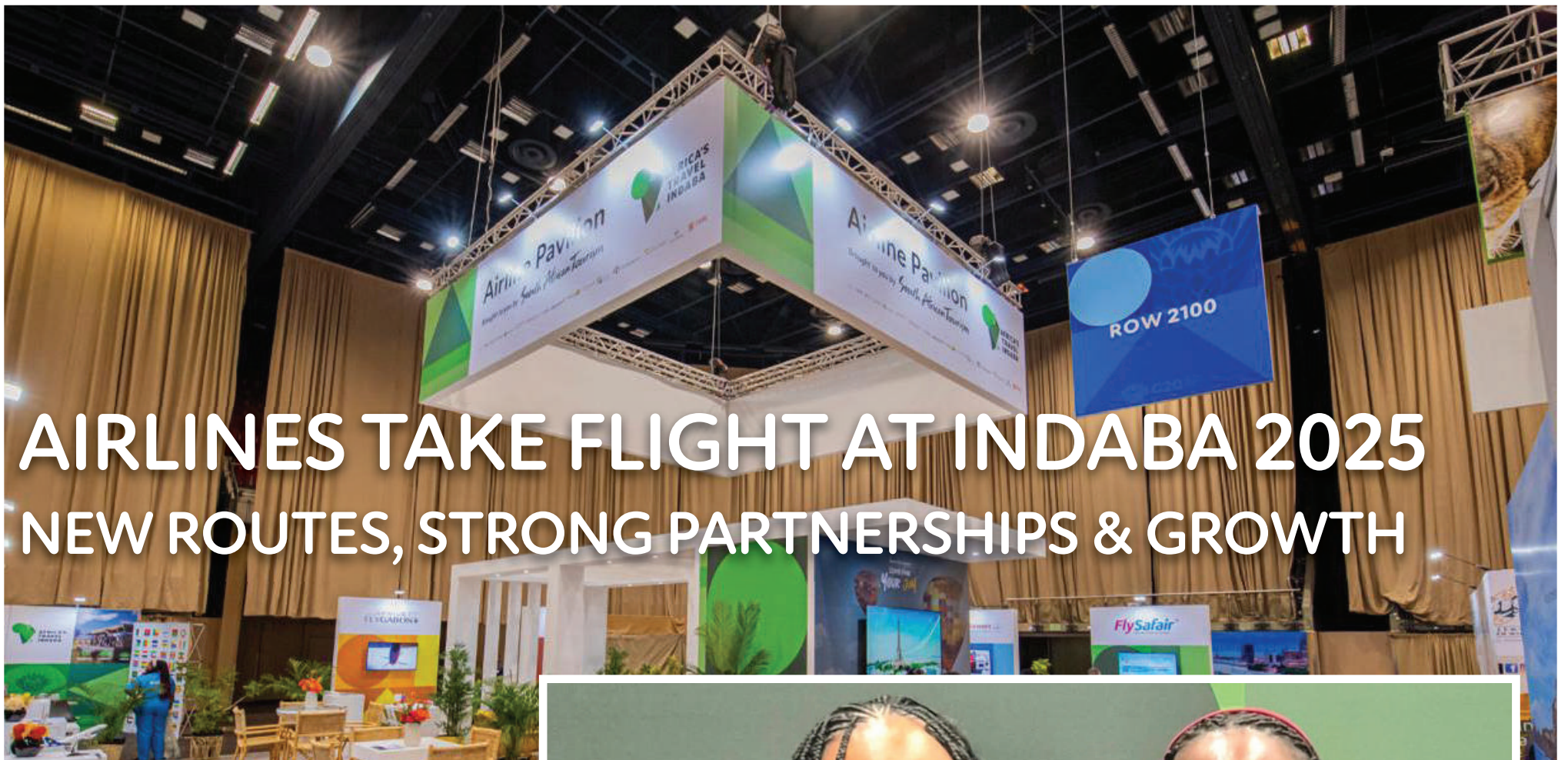
A panel of expert judges, including a globally published photojournalist, humanitarian storyteller, and an award-winning creative director, will shortlist 20 standout images. From 9 to 27 June, the public will vote for their favourite. Winners will be announced on 2 July, with a curated public exhibition to follow.

Prizes:

The winner will enjoy a luxury two-night photo safari for two at Madwaleni River Lodge in the Babanango Game Reserve in KwaZulu-Natal. The prize includes meals and accommodation, and daily game drives in the company of a professional photographer.

Four runners-up will each receive a large Recycled Buddy Backpack from Sealand Gear, valued at R 2,695.00.

"Your camera is more powerful than you think," says Maponyane. "It's how we frame what matters. And if we don't tell that story, who will?"



AIRLINES TAKE FLIGHT AT INDABA 2025 NEW ROUTES, STRONG PARTNERSHIPS & GROWTH

Africa's Travel Indaba 2025 proved to be a high-flying success for some of the continent's leading airlines, with exhibitors reporting fruitful meetings, strengthened partnerships and significant interest in expanding both domestic and international air routes.

Kirsty Hutchinson, Marketing Manager at CemAir, reflected on a highly productive event. "The meetings were amazing, great quality. We had excellent engagements with buyers and relevant Municipalities, which helped us understand what routes are in demand. As we approach our 20th anniversary, we're excited to be growing and exploring new destinations. Watch this space; we have big plans."

Lift Airlines also made a strong impression at their first-ever Indaba. Key Account Manager Jamain Doravaloo praised the seamless coordination of the show. "It's been extremely good. A big compliment to Refilwe and the Global Trade team - the planning and communication were flawless, and all stakeholder needs were met. We had great meetings, and people were even booking flights on the spot. There's definite appetite for new domestic and regional routes, and we're looking forward to growing and shining in the months ahead."



Kenya Airways continues to see strong demand for regional air travel. "The show was good this year; we had many productive meetings," said Kenneth Kenei, the airline's Country Manager. "We currently operate nine flights weekly from Cape Town to Nairobi, and four daily flights from Nairobi to Johannesburg. This shows just how busy regional air traffic is becoming. Indaba has reinforced our position as a key connector across East and Southern Africa." Meanwhile, Uganda Airlines announced a major milestone. "On Sunday, 18 May, we will be launching non-stop flights from Entebbe to London Gatwick, four times a week,"

said Sales Executive Clair Nakaayi. "Indaba has been an amazing experience - the turnout has been huge, and the platform has allowed us to showcase our growing services to an international audience. We're also planning to add Cape Town to our regional route offering. Currently, we are the only airline offering direct flights between Entebbe and Johannesburg, which operate daily."

The upbeat sentiment from airline exhibitors highlights not only a renewed sense of optimism in African aviation but also the importance of platforms like Indaba in driving business, building networks and unlocking opportunities for connectivity across the continent and beyond.

THE STORY BEHIND LIFT AIRLINE'S DELICIOUS COOKIES

Khayelitsha Cookies, based in Beaconvale, Parow, is more than just a bakery; it is a beacon of hope and empowerment for women from Khayelitsha and surrounding areas. Rene, the sales and marketing manager, explains, "We employ ladies who often cannot read, write, or speak English or Afrikaans, making it difficult for them to find work. We train them using pictures and their home language, Xhosa, so they can bake our cookies by hand"-a process that takes forty days, compared to one day in large factories.

Their handmade cookies, including specially developed double chocolate and oats varieties, have found their way onto airline menus after a serendipitous encounter at the World Tourism Market. Rene recalls, "We gave samples to the Lift Airlines stand, and they were blown away. Since then, we have been supplying them for over a year and a half, receiving marvellous



feedback and countless requests from customers wanting to know where to buy our cookies." Khayelitsha Cookies prides itself on being "a cookie with a conscience," baked passionately by hand with a secret ingredient: love. Rene emphasises, "Our cookies are not mass-produced; they are made in smaller batches with care. We believe airlines and other buyers should support local manufacturers who bring passion and quality to their products."

The company's mission extends beyond baking. By creating meaningful jobs, they empower women to support up to five dependents each, fostering dignity and economic independence. Rene highlights the broader impact: "If more airlines and businesses bought locally, it would help create employment and uplift communities." Khayelitsha Cookies stands as a testament to how business can blend quality, social impact, and community upliftment-one delicious cookie at a time.

THE POWER OF MUSIC IN SHAPING SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM

South Africa's music scene is not just a source of national pride, it is a powerful engine for tourism, economic growth, and cultural authenticity.

As the world's eyes turn to the country's vibrant festivals and homegrown genres, industry leaders are calling for a renewed focus on sustainability and ownership of South Africa's musical assets.

"We have literally given away what belongs to us, to other people to actually curate and get back to the country," reflected Thembisile Sehloho, Chief Marketing Officer of South African Tourism, lamenting how genres like Amapiano are often celebrated abroad before being fully embraced and leveraged at home.

This sentiment underscores a key challenge: ensuring that South Africa's unique musical identity is both protected and promoted as a tourism asset.

Sean Duvet, founding partner and director of Ultra South Africa, highlighted how large-scale music events can serve as catalysts for tourism and economic development. Ultra Music Festival started in Miami 25 years ago and it's now branched out to be the biggest music festival tourist world on continents... South Africa

is part of an unbelievable network," he explained.

Ultra South Africa's impact is staggering:

- 40,000 attendees between Johannesburg and Cape Town
- 500 million rand generated in a single weekend
- Over 4,000 jobs created, with 300 suppliers involved
- Visitors from every continent and at least 10 African countries

Duvet emphasised the festival's role in showcasing South Africa to the world: "It's this unbelievable platform for our country to show the rest of the world." The ripple effect extends far beyond ticket sales, benefiting hotels, transport, fashion, and countless small businesses.

A recurring theme in the discussion was the importance of authenticity. South African music - whether it is Amapiano, house, or the eclectic sounds featured at Ultra - must remain rooted in local culture even as it gains global traction. Duvet noted, "Because of our global network, Ultra being the world's biggest music festival, we have access to the rest of the world and we've got all of those eyeballs who support us as well."

This global reach is a double-edged sword: while it brings international attention, it also risks diluting the uniquely South African character of these events. The challenge, then, is to ensure that music tourism remains sustainable-benefiting local communities, nurturing homegrown talent, and fostering a sense of ownership.

The economic benefits of music tourism are clear, but sustainability requires long-term thinking. As Sehloho pointed out, "Festivals like Ultra must continue to innovate, ensuring that their success translates into lasting opportunities for South Africans."

Moreover, music is a form of soft power-a way to shape perceptions of South Africa on the world stage. By curating authentic experiences and telling uniquely South African stories, the country can attract not just tourists, but investors, artists, and collaborators.

By prioritising sustainability, authenticity, and local ownership, it can transform festivals and genres into enduring pillars of tourism and national identity. As Duvet put it, "It's a beautiful opportunity... to bridge and bring people together through the power of music and culture and tourism."

EMPOWERING CREATORS AND BUILDING REAL CONNECTIONS IN FILM

Championing authenticity, youth empowerment, and industry collaboration as the keys to unlocking the true economic and cultural potential of South African film and tourism.

James Byrne, representing ITFFA and a prominent media guest at Africa's Travel Indaba, brings a passionate and pragmatic voice to the conversation about South Africa's film and tourism industries. With the ITFFA event set for Sandton from 2 to 6 June 2025, James is determined to drive a new narrative-one that is authentic, immersive, and inclusive.

James is a strong advocate for empowering young creators through accessible technology. "You have got a smartphone, you create a protector iPhone. Apple shoots a full-length feature production every single year. Only using iPhone. It does 4 and 8k. It does not pixelate. It is on point."

However, he is also clear-eyed about the impact of artificial intelligence and automation. "The whole AI thing, they are testing the waters and they are not going to push it beyond a certain point because the world is not ready for that yet. It is for the next generation." He sees value in using AI as a tool but

insists on the importance of authenticity: "We do not want automated generated output. We want authentic, we want immersive, emotional."

Reflecting on the current state of the industry, James Byrne shared, "If you look at the business case study we did with the Commercial Producers Association, Stats SA and FIBRE, the numbers speak for themselves. From November 2023 to the end of February 2025, the South African film industry grossed a staggering R8.4 billion. But here's the real eye-opener: feature films make up less than 10% of that total.

"The real drivers are series and commercials, which account for more than half of the industry's contribution. This is where the quick turnaround happens - flights, airport transfers, accommodation - and that is where tourism really starts to benefit. In black and white, I can prove that as a direct result of film productions, half a billion rand has been spent on the tourism ecosystem alone."

James calls on industry professionals to invest in themselves and each other, rather than waiting for government intervention. "Conversations are starting to take place between film and tourism as to how we can

attract more productions. What can we, as tourism, do in the film space to benefit from this association? What do co-production opportunities look like? The time has come for us in the industry to take matters into our own hands, to build stronger partnerships between film and tourism. The future of film in South Africa is in our hands, and it is up to us to make it work - for ourselves, for tourism, and for the next generation of storytellers."

He urges the next generation to seize the tools at their disposal, create authentic content, and build a community that values real connection over empty spectacle.



CELEBRATING CHANGEMAKERS AT THE ATI 2025 INSPIRATION AWARDS

Africa's Travel Indaba 2025 not only spotlighted the best in travel and tourism but also honoured the individuals and organisations driving sustainable, inclusive, and innovative change in the industry through the prestigious Inspiration Awards and Green Stand Awards.

Leading the charge was John Arvanitakis, recipient of the Inspiration Award. As Chairperson of the Event Greening Forum and founder of Chattr Xperience, Arvanitakis has played a crucial role in shaping the sustainability vision for ATI 2025.

His leadership in aligning local practices with global benchmarks such as ISO 20121 and the Better Stands initiative has inspired exhibitors and suppliers alike. His "HeroMe" campaign exemplified how trade shows can engage the public meaningfully, proving that sustainability can be both practical and powerful.

The Innovation Award went to Mohammed Baba of Aurum Tours, recognised for rebuilding his business from the ashes of COVID-19 and driving real transformation in the tourism landscape. His journey is a testament to resilience and visionary thinking.

Eugene Relling of Bushwise received the Empowerment Award for his work through the Ranger Academy NPC, which sponsors previously disadvantaged individuals on safari guiding courses and secures them long-term employment. His efforts are helping build a more inclusive and diverse industry from the ground up.

Taking home the Transformation Award was Ravi Naidoo



of PMP Perm Guard, who has collaborated closely with Women in Tourism to inspire youth and foster new mindsets within the sector. His dedication to mentorship and youth empowerment is driving systemic change.

The Excellence Award was presented to Gerhard Franken of Naledi Hospitality and Consultants, whose work as a grading assessor, mentor, and youth advocate continues to uplift communities and raise the bar for service delivery across rural South Africa.



The Exhibitor Green Stand Awards also recognised those embracing eco-conscious exhibition design. Machaba Safaris, Smangaliso Wetland Park, and WESGRO; Cape Town Tourism & Western Cape Trade & Investment took top honours in the Small, Medium, and Large Stand categories, respectively. Special mentions were given to Asilia Lodges & Camps for their sustainable approach.

Together, these awards reflect the heart of Indaba: a celebration of passion, purpose, and progress in African tourism.



100 MESSAGES A DAY!

Mangwanani African Spa provided some much-needed relief for sore feet and knotted shoulders at Africa's Travel Indaba this week.

Mangwanani African Spa provided essential relief for sore feet and knotted shoulders at Africa's Travel Indaba this week.

Cindy Govender shared that the little spots of serenity around the Durban ICC delivered at least 100 massages each day, offering attendees a refreshing break from the hustle and bustle of the event.

Govender explains that the woman empowerment company didn't really have funds to book a spot or a stand at the Indaba. "South African Tourism were kind enough to invite us to be part of

their team and do the welcome for their guests, because we've worked with them previously."

The 22-year-old company has 22 branches based in Durban, Johannesburg, and Cape Town.

"We take women off the street that do not have an education, do not have a qualification, and cannot get a job, and we empower them by training them in-house and then offering them employment. So, we don't do handouts, but we offer them in the form of an opportunity to have a trade and that's how they earn an income."





POST-SHOW THOUGHTS FROM ALAN CAMPBELL ON THE 2025 AFRICA'S TRAVEL INDABA

Following a busy and dynamic few days in Durban, Alan Campbell, Sales and Marketing Director at ANEW Hotels & Resorts, shared his reflections on this year's Africa's Travel Indaba:

"I think this year's Indaba has been a great success. We managed to connect with a lot of people from the African continent, which is exciting for us. A lot of new partnerships have been kicked off, and it has been nice connecting with high-quality buyers and international visitors, as well as reconnecting with colleagues and industry peers on the current challenges in the industry and how each entity is trying to face them", he says.

He continues, "I think there are more and more discussions around how we are doing that together, which is exciting, and we at ANEW Hotels & Resorts, are ready to play our part."



"Indaba also delivered a strong media presence for ANEW, with a great set of interviews secured across key South African outlets. It was an energising few days for our entire ANEW media

team, who were on the ball and passionate about driving conversations around the tourism sector and hospitality in South Africa," Alan concludes.

As always, Indaba remains a vital platform for forging meaningful connections, sparking fresh ideas, and driving collaborative efforts across the tourism sector. The ANEW team is energised and looking forward to what lies ahead.



ANEW®
HOTELS & RESORTS

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SHOWCASING UNTAPPED WONDERS OF THE NORTHERN CAPE

The Northern Cape, South Africa's largest province by landmass and one of its least populated, remains one of the country's most underrated tourism destinations.

Known for its semi-desert landscapes, wide open spaces, rich biodiversity, and rugged natural beauty, the province is often overlooked in favour of more well-known regions. However, the Northern Cape is determined to shift the spotlight.

Led by Mr. Thabang Sibhono, Chief Director at the Department of Agriculture, Environmental Affairs, Rural Development and Land Reform, the Environment and Nature Conservation Directorate is showcasing the immense eco-tourism potential of the province's Four Departmental Nature Reserves: Oorlogskloof, Rolfontein, Doornkloof, and Goegap. Located along the Cape-Namibian route (N7), these reserves not only offer immersive nature experiences but are also strategically positioned to boost local economies and job creation.

Underappreciated Gems

Despite its vast size and natural richness, the Northern Cape remains the least visited province in South Africa. "A key reason is lack of awareness - many travellers simply don't know about the province's offerings. Its sparse population, semi-desert climate, and vast distances between attractions can also discourage traditional tourism. As a result, destinations like the Augrabies Falls, one of South Africa's most

spectacular waterfalls, remain largely underappreciated on the national tourism map," notes Sibhono.

In addition, he adds that limited marketing and integration into broader tourism networks—such as those managed by SANParks—have meant that many of the province's natural treasures are overshadowed by more popular destinations like the Garden Route, Kruger National Park, or even Victoria Falls.

The Four Nature Reserves

Each of the four highlighted reserves offers unique experiences:

Rolfontein Nature Reserve, perched on the southern banks of Vanderkloof Dam, borders South Africa's second-largest dam by volume. With a 108-meter-high dam wall—the highest in the country—it offers spectacular views, waterside leisure, and rich biodiversity. The dam area is ideal for eco-tourism development and recreational activities yet remains largely unknown to the public.

Goegap Nature Reserve, near Springbok, is a biodiversity hotspot and part of the Succulent Karoo biome, one of the most botanically rich arid regions in the world. It offers stunning floral displays, especially during the spring wildflower season.

Oorlogskloof and Doornkloof Nature Reserves are known for their dramatic landscapes, rugged hiking trails, rock art sites, and endemic plant and animal species. These reserves are ideal for ecotourism,

birdwatching, and conservation tourism.

The province is also home to Witsand Nature Reserve, famous for its white sand dunes and the mysterious "roaring sands" phenomenon. This area offers tourism facilities on-site and hiking opportunities for nature lovers and adventure seekers.

Conservation & Tourism

The Northern Cape's participation at the Indaba, under the theme "Unlimited Africa", emphasizes not just its landscapes, but its vision. As the Executive Manager responsible for environment and biodiversity, Sibhono affirms that conservation and tourism are not at odds but they are deeply connected.

"Protecting our biodiversity, expanding ecological awareness, and providing eco-tourism experiences go hand-in-hand. For instance, visitors can explore the confluence of the Orange and Vaal Rivers near Augrabies Falls—a site of ecological and geographical significance. With greater visibility, this area could rival more famous African destinations," he explains.

The province is also leveraging its vineyards and agricultural landscapes, showcasing how green, fertile regions can exist alongside semi-desert environments. This juxtaposition offers unique experiences like wine tasting in unexpected places, farm stays, and agro-tourism.

A Call for Collaboration

The Department is actively seeking partnerships, particularly with SANParks, to integrate Northern Cape reserves into broader tourism circuits. When visitors can't find accommodation in national parks, our provincial reserves can serve as appealing alternatives with comparable beauty and comfort.

This Indaba is not just a marketing opportunity but also a call to action. "We are inviting travel agents, tour operators, investors, and conservationists to explore a province that has been South Africa's best-kept secret for too long. With more than seven reserves equipped with tourism facilities, a coastline few have explored, and a biodiversity index unmatched in many parts of the world, the Northern Cape is ready to emerge as a destination of choice—not only for its natural beauty but for the promise of sustainable development and inclusive growth," he concludes.



Theme

**"Sustainable Tourism:
Driving Inclusive Growth"**



5 – 7 June
2025



**Mulungushi International
Conference Centre (MICC)**
Kenneth Kaunda Wing
Lusaka, Zambia

MALAWI IS ACTIVELY EXPANDING ITS FOOTPRINT

Historically, Malawi has targeted Southern Africa as its core market, but a new focus is emerging.

Malawi is redefining its place on the continental tourism map, drawing on its unique strengths while looking beyond its traditional markets to explore new opportunities.

Historically, Malawi has targeted Southern Africa as its core market, but a new focus is emerging. With increased interest from East Africa - particularly Kenya and Tanzania - the country is actively expanding its footprint. Strategically located, Malawi lies just two hours by air from both Johannesburg and Nairobi, with regular flights operated by Malawian Airlines and Kenya Airways. This proximity, along with direct air connectivity, positions Malawi as a convenient destination for travellers across the region.

Intimate and Serene

"Unlike the vast and often crowded safari circuits of countries like Kenya, Malawi offers a more intimate and serene wildlife experience. Its national parks and game reserves - like Liwonde and Majete—are known for low visitor numbers, which enhances the exclusivity and authenticity of the experience," says Dr. Noah Nansongole, director of Tourism at Visit Malawi, said at the 2025 edition of Africa's Travel Indaba this week. "Within just a few hours' drive, travellers can transition from game viewing to beach relaxation along the shores of Lake Malawi, and even engage in cultural or adventure tourism in the highlands."

World Heritage Site

Lake Malawi, the third-largest in Africa and ninth-largest globally, dominates the country's landscape and plays a pivotal role in its tourism. It offers pristine beaches,

freshwater diving, snorkeling, and a unique aquatic ecosystem. The lake is home to more than 1,000 species of cichlid fish - many endemic - and its southern tip is protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Lake **Malawi National Park**.

Malawi's appeal goes far beyond landscapes and wildlife. The country prides itself on cultural authenticity, with deep-rooted traditions and minimal foreign influence. It is home to two UNESCO-designated intangible cultural heritages - Gule Wamkulu (a sacred masked dance) and the Chongoni Rock Art Area, which houses one of Central Africa's most extensive concentrations of rock paintings. "Visitors can immerse themselves in the country's traditions through homestays and community tourism initiatives. Malawi is also building its profile in gastronomy tourism, mapping local cuisines and developing national food festivals. Traditional dishes such as Sima (also known as Ugali) have been recognized for their cultural significance and unique preparation methods, with efforts underway to have them acknowledged globally," explains Nansongole.

Between East and Southern Africa

Geographically and culturally, Malawi occupies a unique space that bridges East and Southern Africa. Its terrain and waterscapes align with East Africa, while its economic and regional alliances often place it within the Southern African context. This duality gives Malawi a strategic advantage in capturing tourist flows from both regions. To capitalize on this, Malawi is working to operationalize a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed with Kenya in 2021. The partnership aims to foster



collaboration between tour operators, expand marketing initiatives, and promote Malawi as both an add-on and standalone destination.

Nansongole highlighted the need for African countries to rethink tourism narratives. "While Africa continues to be seen mainly as a wildlife destination, today's travellers crave immersive and experiential tourism—connecting with culture, food, local stories, and real life. Malawi is embracing this shift, encouraging regional collaboration to grow intra-African tourism and reclaim Africa's rich and diverse heritage as a central tourism product," he concludes.

BOTSWANA TOURISM FOCUSES ON QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Botswana, a jewel in Southern Africa's tourism crown, once again made a bold statement at this year's Africa's Travel Indaba. With a clear and compelling mission, Botswana Tourism aimed to reaffirm the country's position as a high-value, low-impact destination, offering a pristine, authentic, and sustainable African experience.

"This year, Botswana showcased not only its iconic safari offerings but also a rich cultural heritage and a deep commitment to conservation, making it a standout on the African tourism landscape," says Keitumetse Setlang, CEO of the Botswana Tourism Organisation (BTO). The primary objective for Botswana Tourism's participation at Indaba 2025 was to strengthen the country's brand as one of Africa's premier eco-tourism destinations. Botswana continues to attract travellers who value authenticity, exclusivity, and sustainability. "By focusing on quality over quantity, Botswana



distinguishes itself from other destinations in the region. It offers a low-density tourism model that prioritizes meaningful visitor experiences and minimizes environmental impact. Events like Indaba enable Botswana to not only showcase its offerings but also to assert itself as a regional leader in sustainable tourism," adds Keitumetse.

Botswana used the Indaba platform to unveil exciting developments:

Eco-luxury Lodges: New high-end lodges that blend sustainability with comfort are being introduced, offering secluded retreats in stunning natural settings.

Cultural Programs: Community-led tours, storytelling experiences, and traditional culinary showcases are being expanded to deepen cultural engagement.

Adventure Tourism: New walking safaris, quad biking across salt pans, and conservation-focused expeditions are tailored for the younger, adventurous traveler.

Digital Nomad Initiatives: Recognising the rise in remote work, Botswana is creating digital-friendly environments that offer peace, connectivity, and inspiration.

The COVID-19 pandemic further validated Botswana's tourism model. With global travellers now seeking safer, more meaningful, and secluded travel, Botswana's offerings perfectly align with this shift. As a result, Botswana has seen more demand for private safaris and remote nature escapes.

"Interest in conservation tourism has grown, with visitors

eager to contribute to wildlife protection efforts. In addition, the avoidance of mass tourism has preserved the serenity and ecological integrity of Botswana's protected areas," she notes.

While the Okavango and Chobe remain Botswana's flagship attractions, the country is promoting lesser-known but equally mesmerizing destinations like Makgadikgadi Pans - One of the largest salt flats in the world, ideal for stargazing, quad biking, and flamingo watching. There is also Tuli Block, a hidden treasure with dramatic rock formations, wildlife, and cultural interactions. Nxai Pan & Kgalagadi Desert is another hidden gem offering solitude, ancient baobabs, and sightings of black-maned lions.

Botswana is also actively working to diversify its offerings to appeal to younger travelers and niche markets too through eco-adventures and walking safaris offer active, immersive experiences. They also offer cultural immersion programs that provide deeper understanding of local traditions.

"Gastronomy tourism is gaining traction, with local flavors and traditional cooking experiences becoming part of the itinerary."

Botswana's tourism strategy is inseparable from its environmental ethos. Conservation is not just a message but a movement backed by real partnerships and initiatives like collaboration with WWF and other conservation organisations.

BUFFALO CITY: UNHERALDED JEWEL OF CULTURE, SPORT & CREATIVITY

Buffalo City, stretching along the Eastern Cape's sun-kissed coastline, is a destination brimming with untold stories, world-class sporting prowess, and a creative spirit that is second to none.

Yet, as Phindile Mavundla, General Manager for Tourism, Arts, Culture and Heritage, reflects, "You are sitting with this beautiful destination, but it is unknown." It is time for South Africa to turn its gaze to this remarkable region and realise its immense tourism potential. Buffalo City's uniqueness lies in its ability to offer visitors a blend of authentic rural experiences, vibrant urban culture, and easy access to adventure. "We offer diverse experiences, which are different to what the Wild Coast or Nelson Mandela Bay is offering," says Mavundla. "Our environment is more of a rural setting, so we can offer that authentic cultural experience. But you can also do a game drive or a safari, because we have three game reserves within 30 minutes of the city centre."

Cradle of Champions

The city's sporting legacy is legendary. From packed stadiums hosting top-flight soccer matches to the iconic Buffalo Regatta, Buffalo City is a sports destination of choice. "We host the Buffalo Regatta annually, every February, and we attract a lot of people from outside our city. That generates a lot of income for us," Mavundla explains. The region's four golf courses, international cricket matches, and the largest swimming pool in the country - the John Harrison pool - make it a magnet for sporting events at every level. Buffalo City is not only a sporting powerhouse but a cradle of champions. The city's rich boxing heritage has produced numerous South African and world boxing champions, earning it the nickname "the home of boxing." This tradition continues to inspire

young athletes and draws boxing aficionados from across the country.

Creative Credentials

The city's intellectual and creative credentials are equally impressive. Home to two respected universities - the University of Fort Hare and Walter Sisulu University - Buffalo City is a centre of academic excellence and innovation. These institutions attract students and researchers from across Africa, nurturing the next generation of leaders. Adding to its cultural prestige, Buffalo City has been declared a UNESCO Creative City of Literature. This accolade recognises the city's vibrant literary scene, its historic publishing houses, and its role in nurturing some of South Africa's most celebrated writers. It is a testament to the city's creative heartbeat and its commitment to storytelling and knowledge. Buffalo City is a lifestyle destination where visitors can set their own pace. "There is no adrenaline rush when you get here. You do things at your own pace and do things that you want to do. We are a family-friendly destination," says Mavundla. The city's sea-facing International Convention Centre, its array of hotels, and a calendar packed with marathons, music festivals, and cultural events break the seasonality of tourism and offer something for everyone, year-round.

United Effort

Despite its riches, Buffalo City faces challenges in connectivity. Limited flight frequencies and a shallow harbour restrict the flow of visitors. Mavundla is



clear: "What is the frequency of those airlines coming in and going out? That is limiting in terms of the traffic that you can attract into our city." She calls on Transnet to prioritise harbour upgrades and on airlines to increase flight frequencies and routes. Crucially, cruise companies are urged to innovate by offering more frequent, smaller cruises tailored to the harbour's current depth. "We have managed to secure about eight cruises that were able to dock," says Mavundla, "but we need to convince them to spend more time in our area as opposed to just a quick stop." In the spirit of Africa's Travel Indaba, Mavundla calls for a united effort: "Growing tourism in Buffalo City requires collaboration across private and governmental sectors, with a focus on sustainability and authenticity. By working together, we can craft integrated packages that showcase our unique blend of culture, sport, and creativity."

LIFESAVING SOUTH AFRICA: PROTECTING TOURISTS AND COMMUNITIES WITH WATER SAFETY

Tucked away in the bustling core of Durban lies one of the city's most vibrant and authentic experiences, the Markets of Warwick walking tour. A guided stroll through this nine-market ecosystem is not just a shopping trip; it's a cultural immersion into the soul of the city.

Warwick Junction, located just west of Durban's city centre, dates back to the early 1900s when it served as a pivotal transport interchange. Over time, informal traders began to cluster around the railway station, and what started as a modest street-side market grew into one of the largest informal trading hubs in Africa, employing over 6,000 traders and supporting thousands more indirectly. "The Markets of Warwick are where Durban breathes," says local tour guide Sanele Mvuyane, who has been leading tours here for nearly a decade. "Each market has its own story, its own smell, its own rhythm. This isn't something you find in a shopping mall."

The guided walking tour, lasting approximately 2 to 3 hours, winds through nine distinct markets, from the traditional medicine market and the bovine head market, to the bead market and herb market. At each stop, visitors are introduced to traders who have often been in the same family for generations, offering everything from muthi (traditional medicines) and Zulu beadwork to spice blends and hand-woven baskets. "This place is alive," Mvuyane says, gesturing toward rows of traders preparing steaming cow heads - a Zulu delicacy. "When you walk here, you walk through living history. You hear isiZulu, Hindi, English, and you smell curry, incense, and herbs. It's a sensory map of Durban's cultural mix."



STELLENBOSCH: WHERE SUSTAINABILITY MEETS AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES

As South Africa's vibrant tourism landscape evolves, Stellenbosch stands out as a beacon of authentic experiences, sustainability, and community spirit.

Annemie Liebenberg, CEO of Visit Stellenbosch, shared why this destination is more than just a place to visit, it is a place to belong.

"Stellenbosch is a destination to explore, slow down, and immerse yourself in," Liebenberg explained. "From award-winning wines and gourmet gastronomy to rich cultural heritage and stunning landscapes, every season offers something new and exciting."

This year-round appeal invites visitors to engage deeply with the region's unique blend of heritage and modern innovation.

At the heart of Stellenbosch's tourism success is its commitment to sustainability and community inclusion. Through initiatives like the Township and Village social enterprise, Stellenbosch is pioneering a tourism model that empowers local entrepreneurs and preserves cultural authenticity.

Co-founder Nicolette Booyens said: "This initiative gives expression to the South African tourism-led economic development strategy and is a blueprint for successful

community-based tourism development."

By creating market access for community-based tourism entrepreneurs, Stellenbosch ensures that growth benefits all sectors, fostering lasting social and economic impact. Sustainability is more than a buzzword here; it is a guiding principle. The University of Stellenbosch, in partnership with local organisations, actively promotes sustainable development through research and community engagement.

Projects addressing waste management, renewable energy, and water conservation demonstrate a holistic approach to environmental stewardship. "It takes a village to bring about meaningful change," said Liebenberg, underscoring the collaborative spirit that drives Stellenbosch's tourism and sustainability efforts. Africa's Travel Indaba 2025 offered a platform for Stellenbosch to showcase this inclusive, community-driven tourism model. "Indaba is not just about highlighting our beautiful destination; it is a chance to connect with global tourism leaders, forge new partnerships, and shape the future of tourism in one of South Africa's most dynamic regions," Liebenberg noted. Stellenbosch is ready to welcome the world with open arms, inviting travellers to experience a destination where sustainability, authenticity, and community converge. As Liebenberg affirmed, "Stellenbosch is not just a place to visit, but a place to connect, belong, and be inspired."



WALKING THROUGH WARWICK: DISCOVERING DURBAN'S BEATING HEART

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The tour does more than just showcase market life; it also empowers local traders. Part of the proceeds go towards supporting trader-led initiatives that enhance safety, cleanliness, and sustainability within Warwick Junction.

Most importantly, the tour shatters long-standing misconceptions. "Many people, even locals, see this area as chaotic or unsafe," Mvuyane explains. "But once they walk through with us, they realise it's full of warmth,

resilience, and pride. It's one of Durban's best-kept secrets."

Whether you're a foodie, a culture buff, or simply curious, the Markets of Warwick walking tour is a window into Durban's untold stories - vibrant, gritty, and completely unforgettable.



TWIN SISTERS CHAMPION INCLUSIVE TOURISM

The “Shaping Sustainability” Boma Talk at Africa’s Travel Indaba 2025 was brought to life by the inspiring story of twin sisters Busisiwe and Gugu Ngcelwane, founders of Twin Ventures. Their message was clear: sustainable tourism must be inclusive, people-focused, and built on passion and resilience. Opening the session, Busisiwe reflected on the duo’s journey as young Black women breaking into the male-dominated adventure tourism space. “It’s never easy, especially when you’re starting with nothing but a dream,” she said. “But we’ve learned that even the hardest days grow you. We showed up, we stayed true to ourselves, and we let our work speak for us.”

The sisters shared how they began their business in Cape Town with just four quad bikes and no trailer or vehicle, using profits to slowly grow. “You don’t need everything to start; you need to start with what you have,” added Gugu. Audience members praised the pair’s drive and called for more collaboration across provinces. One participant noted their story was “a beacon of hope for youth in tourism.” On sustainability, Busisiwe stressed starting small: **“It’s not just about the environment. It’s about mindset, education, and everyday actions that lead to lasting change.”**



VOICES FROM THE SUSTAINABILITY VILLAGE



Gugu Bhengu
Gugu Mobile Boutique

Africa Travel Indaba is a very big event where both international and local people attend and it was an awesome experience to be part of it as it's a great boost to our business.



Buthlezi Zaya Zaya
9167

We crochet baby products and toys, and we've had a great experience at Indaba as people had interest in our products from day 1. At first I was worried that it being an adult event, we wouldn't have any sales, but I loved the response that we received. We've also made contacts with people that are exporting and that's exciting too.



Nandipha Msebenzi
Alude Arts

Africa's Travel Indaba has been extraordinary and a great experience for tourism in Durban and South Africa as a whole. It's been a great experience to interact with international travellers, and we've received clients from Belgium, Netherlands, and Africa as a whole. It's been phenomenal and we are looking into growing and collaborating with other businesses.

VOICES FROM THE FLOOR



Amy Chan - Buyer
Travel Consultant, China

I loved my experience at the event because it assisted me to connect with African buyers and sellers. Many Chinese lack knowledge about what they can experience in Africa and coming to this event enlightened me on the destination.



Lina Wang - Buyer
Resource Dept. Director, Uniway, China

It's my first time at Indaba but I have been to South Africa many times. I think the event was wonderful and it's one of the big events in the continent. I loved the fact that there were many African buyers and sellers. We also got a lot of information about many African countries which will make it easier to showcase to the Chinese travellers.



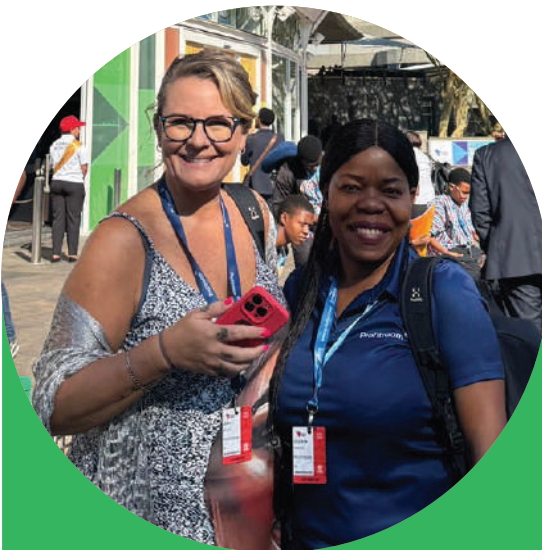
Jane Zhang - Buyer
Shanghai Donghan international Travel Service,

It was my first time coming to the event and I loved it. We wanted to find information about hotels and their activities which the Chinese would love. Chinese people always feel that Africa is unsafe but with the experience that I've had I know that after they come here, they will love it and see how safe it is.



Chizuko Tsubouchi Hosted Buyer
Plenustour Japan LLC. - Japan

"This is my first time attending Indaba, but we are selling South Africa and other countries in Africa very well. Indaba is so valuable because there are so many companies all gathered together. It is so exciting. I am looking for new suppliers and I could see so many people. I am looking for a very unique experience. Game drive and wildlife are my speciality because in Japan, we cannot see the animals and we have to go to the zoo. So, wildlife is very special."



Jacob Overbeek - Hosted Buyer
Reismama - Netherlands

"I am here to learn more from operators and to meet my existing relations. The Indaba has been good. I had a lot of meetings, and they were all great. I am always looking for new connections, meeting new hotels I did not know about and meeting new DMCs for destinations I am not already working with. South Africa is still quite new to me, so it is the most important one."



Jose Maruilson Costa Filho - Hosted Buyer
Business Factory - Brazil

"I bring a delegation of 20 tour operators from Brazil and 5 specialised travel media, and we are enjoying the show to know more about this product to bring to the Brazilian market and to bring the sales of them to South Africa. We are doing this job for South Africa but I think there are many opportunities. I have the key message that that the Brazilians know about South Africa is the Safaris but I think in Africa, there is so much to show to the Brazilian market."



Mansi Bhalaria - Hosted Buyer
Travelties - India

"This is my first time to the Indaba. We have been selling South Africa for the past decade but I wanted to explore the neighbouring regions like Tanzania, Zanzibar, Botswana, Kenya. So, that was the main reason to coming to the Indaba and it has been going well. There are some good prospective hotels, accommodations and safaris. It is quite helpful and insightful to see what is happening in the market, what's trending and what are the rates like."



Praise Nyange - Hosted Buyer
Nyange Adventures - Tanzania

"I am here to connect with all the tour operators across the globe, especially in Africa and here in South Africa. These past 3 days have been very great to connect to so many suppliers, and I would say that it is the way to go for tourism in Africa."



Paulo Sanare Laizer - International Delegate
The African Safari Trails Tanzania Ltd - Tanzania

"My time here has been very beautiful; there has been a lot of things that I have learned and a lot of communication with other buyers. So, it has been an amazing time. South Africa itself with all they are offering intrigues me."



Frederick Awuor - Hosted Buyer
Bontel Adventures Limited - Kenya

"At Indaba, I am looking to get into and learn more about the Southern part of Africa so that is South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia and also getting to meet new business partners as well. I am particularly interested in South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Zambia."



Imy Chua - Hosted buyer
Chan Brothers Travel PTE LTD - Singapore

"This time in Indaba, I am actually looking for new ideas on what I can do for South Africa and in Southern Africa. I am also particularly interested in new places like Uganda, Botswana and Victoria Falls area."



Ngaya Mboya - Explorer
The African Safari Trails Tanzania Ltd - Tanzania

"We came to South Africa to explore other different companies, and we were so happy when we met a lot of people and it would be really interesting to come back again. It is encouraged to come back again. People are really helpful and really charming in explaining the different activities and what they are doing."



