

SA's hospitality sector a gateway to employment

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As South Africa grapples with a persistently high unemployment rate, the tourism and hospitality sector could offer alternative routes to employment.

According to the [World Travel & Tourism Council's Economic Impact Report](#) (EIR) the South African Travel and Tourism sector contributes 6,3% to the GDP. It is projected to grow at an average rate of 7.6% over the next decade, anticipating the creation of more than 800,000 jobs to reach more than 1.9 million by 2032.

In the run-up to the 2024 Africa Travel Indaba, where 55 countries from across the globe will participate in an aim to drive the continent's economic development, Alan Campbell, Sales and Marketing Director of ANEW Hotels & Resorts says the industry presents a wealth of opportunities that often go unrecognised, especially by matric students as a potential career path.

“The hospitality industry has perhaps historically been perceived amongst older generations to be an unstable and a less viable avenue as a career choice. However, the industry is healthy – [international tourist arrivals](#) from January to December 2023 totaling 8.5 million, representing a remarkable 48.9% increase when compared with the same period in 2022. This spike underscores the country's enduring appeal as a premier travel destination.”

“We're witnessing a shift from an era where qualifications reigned supreme to one where practical skills and on-the-job learning take precedence. The hospitality industry welcomes newcomers with open arms, offering roles with minimal barriers to entry.”

He says a healthy tourism industry supports local communities, not only showcasing the area's natural beauty and attractions but also creating job opportunities in remote parts of the country. “The landscape has evolved significantly over the last 30 years and covers a wide range of career opportunities such as finance, digital marketing and event management.”

Campbell says the industry is one of the few where without prior experience one can carve a prosperous career.

“We have several success stories where someone started in reception and worked their way up to a General Manager and even Director positions. Many people in the hospitality industry join with no existing hotel experience. With the right attitude and eagerness to learn, the industry offers a multitude of opportunities.”

He emphasises that there is a clear gap in job creation and talent development, one that could be bridged through closer collaboration with high schools and educational institutions.

“At its core, the hospitality sector is a classroom without walls, where the curriculum extends beyond textbooks to the tangible nuances of human interaction daily. From customer service to conflict resolution, the industry imparts invaluable life skills that transcend the boundaries of a formal education. The ability to adapt, communicate effectively, and work under pressure are essential facets of a hospitality professional's skill set.”

“Practical experience is crucial, and the industry offers a unique learning environment where hands-on training reigns supreme. Young people should recognise the value in embracing the ethos of starting at the bottom and mastering every aspect of the job. Qualifications matter, however, less than the ability to deliver exceptional service and nurture genuine connections with people.”

Campbell says that the appeal of the hospitality sector is not confined to those venturing on their careers straight out of matric. “For those already studying or seeking to broaden their horizons, part-time roles within the industry offer a flexible avenue for financial independence and skill refinement. Whether waiting tables or managing reservations, students can seamlessly integrate theoretical knowledge with real-world application.”

“The beauty of this proposition lies in its scalability. What starts as a part-time job can evolve into a full-fledged career, with ample opportunities for progression and specialisation. The hospitality sector, with its myriad of roles from culinary arts, waitering, serving, cooking, cleaning, reservations up to event management, accommodates diverse aspirations,” says Campbell.

“The hospitality sector isn't just a temporary fix; it's a source of untapped potential ready to be harnessed—one guest interaction, one dish, and one event at a time.”

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