

## UP Museums Commentary Series

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### Commentary on the Tourism Sector Recovery Webinar

As promised by the CEO of South African Tourism, Sisa Ntshona, the communication and engagement with the tourism industry continues. For this purpose, another [webinar](#) was presented on 11 May 2020 from 12:30 to 13:30. As a panel member, the CEO of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA), Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa, was invited. The agenda was to update the tourism sector of the current stage of the Tourism Recovery Plan and the implications faced by the tourism sector with regard to the Risk Adjusted Plan introduced by the President of South Africa.

Sisa Ntshona insisted that the tourism sector recovery should be driven by a bottom-up approach through consultation with members of the industry. And that this would then be presented to the government level to aid the recovery of the tourism industry in the country, as this is where the power lies in order to reopen the sector.

The TBCSA was introduced as a centralised agency that represents the voices and interests of its member associations in the tourism industry. The significance of approaching the government with one collective and representative voice to facilitate the benefits to the industry was stressed in the webinar. This voice would then be presented to the government to ensure that the tourism industry gets heard.

Furthermore, in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis, the TBCSA was active in supporting local tourism businesses. They noticed the impact on bookings in the country and were instrumental in locating the international tourists in South Africa. They identified their numbers, the establishments hosting them, facilitated testing for tourists who had originated from high-risk countries and placed them under quarantine, where necessary. In addition, they identified possible quarantine facilities (such as quarantine hotels located close to the airports in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town for international tourists) and provided a list of these to the government.

Following the inundation by cancellations, postponements, lack of forward bookings and refund payments, many businesses started struggling. This meant that many tourism businesses were struggling to stay afloat. They addressed these concerns to the government and as a result, the Minister of Tourism approached the UIF to ensure that payments would be made. However, after agreeing to a three-month contract with the UIF, it now becomes necessary to revise this to extend the payments until the end of December, as the industry does not expect a meaningful change before then. These UIF payments can be claimed by the tourism businesses on behalf of their employees, or directly by the employees themselves. However, this is only aimed at companies and employees registered with the UIF. This does not yet include tourist guides or other freelancers, as they are not registered with the UIF. For this purpose, the TBCSA aims to look into the issue and to possibly create an alternative fund.

Since no economic activity was possible during the hard lockdown, President Ramaphosa put together a Risk Adjusted Strategy (Level 5 to 1 of Lockdown) to indicate when the different sectors would be able to reopen again and to produce protocols to mitigate the risk of the spread of the Covid-19 virus. This also affects the tourism sector (see [Tourism Risk Rating](#)). There is still uncertainty, when the country or the different provinces and metropolitan areas will move down and how long they will remain on the next level. This depends on the trajectory of the pandemic and it is out of control of the tourism sector.

At this stage, it seems that tourism will be active again on Level 1 and only to some extent on Level 2. Realistically speaking, and keeping in mind that according to prognoses September is likely to be the peak of the pandemic in South Africa, Level 2 may be reached in November and Level 1 only in January or February 2021. For this purpose, the TBCSA invited comments from the members of the tourism industry about possible protocols to be put in place to start reopening the sector earlier, by addressing the possible risks and to hopefully be re-rated as a lesser risk in order to compress the time until the sector can operate again. The results of the suggestions would be collated and presented to the South African government.

At this stage, the projected recovery of the tourism industry is “local first”. The recovery of the tourism sector will be led by domestic tourism, depending on the trajectory of the pandemic and the recovery of the source markets. The first phase of domestic tourism is expected not to be revenue-generating VFR (visiting friends and relatives). However, once tourists regain confidence and once provincial border reopen and curfews are eliminated, there will be a transition to overnight stays and domestic air travel. This transition is also dependent on how the tourism industry addresses the risk of the subsector (e.g. car hire etc.). The next transition point will be the lifting of country border bans. The SADAC land borders to the neighbouring countries would be the first international borders to be relaxed. Regional tourism will be led by self-drive tourism in the first phase. Not all airlines will survive and not all airlines will work with the same schedules as before the advent of the pandemic. This means that African air travel will take some time to get started again, before inbound international travel to South Africa will resume successfully. The International tourism is expected to recover last, once international travel resumes in the first phase, followed by a full recovery of the sector in phase 2 of international travel.

There are many subsectors in the tourism value chain. It is guided by many activities and serves various markets. All of these need to be addressed, as they fall under different levels – some would be able to operate sooner than others.

Realistically, the tourism industry can only start trading again at the end of the year, if the companies can survive until then. Therefore, it is imperative that the tourism industry is proactive to come up with alternatives and protocols to start operating again at higher levels of the lockdown, to “de-risk” the industry or at least some of the subsectors of the tourism industry. Once the risk protocols are in place, all members of the industry must implement them and they need to follow the guidelines

so that fingers cannot be pointed at the tourism industry, should lapses occur, resulting in a renewed closure of the industry.

There are indeed certain areas and aspects of the tourism sector that do not pose such a big risk and that should therefore be allowed to reopen sooner (such as self-drive tourism or car hire as opposed to air travel and bus or other means of communal transportation). Some provinces will not be affected by the lockdown to the same extent as the big metropolitan areas and tourism in these areas should be allowed to proceed sooner. This scenario should also be taken into consideration when planning for the reopening of the tourism industry.

Right now, the focus lies on de-risking the tourism industry and to come up with ideas and protocols to open the tourism sector up sooner. What this means for the UP Museums is not yet entirely clear. As an attraction in the cultural supply basis of the country, we are visitor-orientated and need to plan and put our own protocols in place, once the sector is ready to reopen for domestic, regional and international tourism. However, it is unclear when this will be and if the museum spaces can reopen this year still.