

**UP Museum Commentary Series**  
**By Nicole B Hoffmann, UP Museum Interpretive Officer**  
**South African Tourism Webinar – Tourism Recovery Plan II**

Nicole Hoffmann as the Museum Interpretive Officer and a specialist in Heritage and Cultural Tourism from the University of Pretoria Museums provides valuable insight and professional commentary on the *South African Tourism Webinar – Tourism Recovery Plan* held online on 14 April 2020, hosted by Sisa Ntshona, CEO of South African Tourism. The impact of tourism has greatly affected the economy of South Africa since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and museums globally have been affected and a recovery plan for tourism and museums-alike will need consideration as the year progresses.

During this second part of the online webinar hosted by South African Tourism, the panel of tourism industry experts spoke about expectations and difficulties that are being experienced and lessons that were learned from other countries and from within South Africa. The facilitator and host asked all participants to vote on when they expect the tourism (and aviation) industry to normalize again. Most of the roughly 1700 participants of the webinar maintained that they expect tourism to return to the good 2019 levels only by the first or second quarter in 2021.

For example, the regional manager for Emirates Airlines Southern Africa expects their first international flights to take place by 20 June, depending on when governments may reopen their borders and remove travel restrictions. However, this depends on how the crisis develops. Consensus was that the safety and health of staff, the community and visitors must come first. Should a health threat persist, this date moves back to a later stage. In the meantime, the next five to six weeks will be critical for the survival of all tourism companies, and those that bear the ripple-effect from tourism through indirect employment. However, the biggest fear is that smaller companies do not have the funds to survive the next weeks without an income.

The panel discussed possible new trends: Domestic tourism is expected to recover first, based on the fact that people will not want to get on an airplane due to continued worries about their health - especially on airplanes, airports and cruise ships. They mentioned that people would be prepared to drive for 3 hours, maybe a bit more. Therefore, local tourism would possibly recover first, followed by regional tourism and then only international tourism. Domestic tourism also depends on new pricing: if prices don't increase dramatically and the economy is able to stabilize. Locals won't be able to pay prizes made out for international tourists and international tourists carry the economy as they bring foreign currency into the local economy. On the other hand, the weak Rand has already started to attract visitors from overseas, as a trip to South Africa is currently very cheap for them. Therefore, the weak Rand is actually already driving sales for trips to the country again. Despite the lockdown, it does not mean that people will stop dreaming and planning. Therefore, it is a logical consequence that people overseas are contemplating where to travel to next year. The weak Rand drives this further and the first bookings for the next year to the next 18 months are coming in at international tour operators and wholesalers.

Also, all of the flights and trips that could not take place during the Covid-19 crisis are being rebooked for in a year's time. It is still uncertain in which way the economy and the local regulatory measures will develop, if the crisis will be over, or if a second wave of the pandemic will come about. South Africa still has its main flu season ahead, and summers in Europe, the US and Asia (the main markets) is relatively short - the question was posed, if the pandemic would return in the European winter.

There is much uncertainty still and many fears, especially since many accommodation and aviation establishments are threatened by grounded planes and cancelled and refunded bookings. The biggest fear is that small establishments may not survive, they are already under immense pressure and several funds are being established to attempt to support them. On the other hand, the tourism industry, like the museum industry

is seen as a resilient industry that has survived past economic crises and natural disasters. The tourism industry will bounce back, but it is a matter of when and how. There are more questions than answers at this stage, but a number of new trends are expected to emerge as a result of the pandemic. Some trends identified were as follows:

- Mass tourism may decrease, as well as travels in large groups of people and to large gatherings. Tourists are expected to become more health-conscious and security-conscious. They will rather book individualised trips in smaller groups: niche tourism will grow. Tailor-made trips and travel experiences will become increasingly sought after. This would affect travel to natural and cultural destinations and attractions. It may be very positive for South Africa due to a large offering of natural attractions as a source base. People expect value for money.
- Sustainable tourism is expected to grow. This could possibly mean fewer, but longer trips (travel less but longer). And visits to natural places, but also to off-the-beaten-track places. The pandemic has shown that it is indeed possible to decrease the carbon-footprint of the travel industry.
- The Covid-19 pandemic will have an effect on VISA applications. It may possibly make the process more difficult with the addition of health questions and where visitors have travelled in the past - to identify if they have been to high-risk areas and the like.
- Business tourism will possibly carry on as usual, but leisure tourism will change. Tourists will search for new experiences that will allow them to connect to people and places, to forge human connections, but also to people-free places and nature experiences such as safaris or hiking trips.
- Empty nesters (60 +) will probably be the last group of tourists to start travelling again, as they belong to the most threatened health group.
- Digital technology, virtual and online experiences are increasingly important. They need to entice visitors in such a way that they cannot help but want to travel to have the actual physical experience in person.
- Shorter booking windows in a post-pandemic environment are expected, as all of the trips that were postponed will need to be accommodated.

All of these discussions will be taken into consideration, when the South African Tourism Board develops and builds a Tourism Recovery Plan. It is expected that the tourism demand will persist and even increase following the pandemic, but the biggest need is to re-establish tourist's confidence in travelling, as most don't want to be exposed to close contact with others at the moment. At this stage, it is important to identify new opportunities based on the changing trends and visitor profiles. In this regard, timing will be important and cheap rates that tourists will take advantage of.

The recovery of the tourism sector depends on how South Africa emerges from the pandemic. Due to new consumer needs, in a post-pandemic environment, local tourism establishments need to adapt. At the moment the first priority for the South African Tourism sector is to survive the pandemic, by conserving cash and maintaining liquidity. Thereafter, to adapt and plan ahead (long-term for the next 10 years in a changed environment) and to start capitalizing again. Nevertheless, there is reason for optimism: the demand for travel has not decreased. The tourism industry is resilient and will recover, it has survived other crises before.

The webinar was highly thought-provoking and stimulating. Due to the high demand, another Zoom webinar (Session 3) was set for Thursday, 16 April 2020, at 12:00 to 13:30. It will be the last of the three-part series. Following these discussions and expert consultation, it is expected that South African Tourism will be able to put together a comprehensive Tourism Recovery Plan for the entire tourism sector in the country. [To follow more on these webinars, please follow the links below:](#)

<https://www.southafrica.net/gl/en/trade/press/webinar-tourism-recovery-plan-by-south-african-tourism>

Webinar 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5z5Va9iU9X8>

Webinar 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xDqI7aQx5Y>

Webinar 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xof3ZIU4N8>

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