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OPINION PIECE

University of Pretoria Campus Tours goes digital with interactive, customised virtual tours

By Professor Karen-Leigh Harris, Head of the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies at the University of Pretoria

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the tourism industry worldwide. Many are asking: how will the industry survive; what will it look like in the years to come; can I, or my child, still develop a career in tourism? The University of Pretoria's (UP) Department of Historical and Heritage Studies is tackling this challenge.

Facilitators of travel, accommodation, eateries, curios, entertainment, museums and galleries, and cultural and natural heritage sites have all come to a grinding halt, and many more people have been affected, given that tourism is a sector with a multitudinal multiplier effect and a key component of many economies. The World Travel & Tourism Council estimates that the industry contributed about R441,1 billion (8.7%) to South Africa's 2019 GDP.

But with the industry paused – due to border closures, limited flights, mandatory social distancing and the fear of a surge in cases – now is the time to reconfigure, reimagine and reignite tourism.

For their part, lecturers in UP's Department of Historical and Heritage Studies are repositioning what and how they teach undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Heritage and Cultural Tourism. Focusing on the pre- and post-COVID scenario, students are encouraged to consider how international, continental, national and local travel destinations have been affected and how they can respond. In essence, they must learn to think cautiously, but creatively.

For instance, the BSocSci honours degree in Heritage and Cultural Tourism has reconceived its approach to providing tours of UP's campuses. This course encourages a practical component with its UP Campus Tours (UPCT), an award-winning initiative where students run a stand-alone tourism entity within the university's main Hatfield campus. Students organise, manage and run all aspects of UPCT, offering tours to prospective students, parents, first-year students, exchange students, new academic and administrative staff, school groups and alumni, as well as visiting academics and international dignitaries.

This is much more than an internship. These students are expected to plan and execute activities related to a tourism entity; this includes researching, marketing, financing, managing, liaising, scheduling and conducting the actual tours on campus. Their tours are theoretically grounded and draw on extensive primary and secondary research in the University Archives. It is also imperative that students keep abreast of campus-wide developments and achievements.

For 15 years, UPCT students have been heralded as “ambassadors of the institution” who provide an invaluable marketing service to the university and international academics and dignitaries that visit the campus. Deon Herbst, CEO of Enterprises UP, regards UPCT as “an excellent business simulation exercise, and an opportunity to gain practical experience and acquire various workplace skills to produce students that are workplace-ready”.

In 2020, UPCT developed a new initiative and now offers tailored virtual tours – University of Pretoria Virtual Campus Tours – Interactive (UPVCT – Interactive). The tours use an online platform to take interested guests on an interactive tour of the university from the safety of their homes. These tours are personalised and tailored to interests and requirements, and guests can interact with the guide and ask questions “en route”. UPVCT’s mission is to share our enthusiasm for UP and its rich past and bright future with visitors. These tours are ideal for students, and their parents, who are interested in enrolling at UP.

In July, the 2020 Heritage and Cultural Tourism honours students will run complimentary UPVCT – Interactive tours. For more information or to make a booking please email upcampustours@gmail.com for a unique interactive, customised campus tour.

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 112-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country that has a Faculty of Veterinary Science which is ranked top in Africa, and overall has 120 academic departments, as well as 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 55 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Center for World University Rankings. It is also ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology and law), and among the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences).

In June 2019, the annual UK Financial Times Executive Education Rankings once again ranked GIBS as the top South African and African business school. The University also has an extensive community engagement programme with approximately 33 000 students involved in community upliftment. Furthermore, UP is building considerable capacities and strengths for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by preparing students for the world beyond university and offering work-readiness and entrepreneurship training to its students.

As one of South Africa’s research-intensive universities, UP launched the *Future Africa Campus* in March 2019 as a hub for inter- and transdisciplinary research networks within UP and the global research community to maximise 4IR innovation and address the challenges and stresses our continent and world is facing. In addition, UP also launched the Javett Art Centre in September 2019 as a driver of transdisciplinary research development between the Humanities and other faculties. In 2020 UP will launch Engineering 4.0. as a hub not only for Smart Cities and Transport, but also to link the vast resources in technology and data sciences to other faculties via Future Africa. These initiatives are stimulating new thinking at the frontier of ‘science for transformation’.

For more information, go to www.up.ac.za