

# Meeting travellers' expectations post Covid-19

By [Anton Gillis](#)

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After a period of intense sensory deprivation and living life through the prism of a laptop screen for two years, people are experiencing a heightened need to renew their contact with the world. As international travel resumes, the hospitality industry is set to shift its mindset and service offerings to meet the changing needs of travellers beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.



Source: Supplied | Anton Gillis, Kruger Gate Hotel CEO

Living vicariously through online experiences during the pandemic has led to a more focused approach to travellers' bucket and wish lists, and the search for unique and personalised experiences.

Destinations that were 'visited' online are now a reality once again, and tourism operators must be ready to capitalise on the increasing appetite of people to fulfil their lockdown dreams. In South Africa, we are currently reaping the rewards of a number of well-produced and interactive live online safaris and game drives that kept people's imaginations alive during the toughest periods of the pandemic.

South Africa is a truly unique destination, but in the new world order, we cannot sit on our laurels as we are forced to compete for the attention of the increasingly sophisticated and hyper-aware traveller of 2022 and beyond.

## Out of the box thinking

Hotels and other tourism operators must now think out of the box and find a way to stand out from the crowd, switching up service offerings at the same time as providing comfort and safety and all the amenities that guests have come to expect.

In particular, the younger travellers made up of Millennials and Gen-Zs are looking for brands with a conscience, companies that demonstrate corporate and social responsibility and brands that genuinely embrace environmentally responsible practices. There is not a 'use and dispose of' generation, but one that lives in a state of mindfulness, connected to and aware of their impact on the planet. This translates into responsible tourism, offsetting carbon footprints, and choosing service providers who can meet these criteria. Whichever way they do it, travel is back on the agenda and, with it, the desire to meet the needs of all types of travellers.



## How younger generations are putting their stamp on business travel

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As part of this collective re-focusing, we, for example, recently announced the 'deflagging' of the four-star Kruger Gate Hotel from the international hotel group, Marriott and from operating under its local Protea Hotel brand. This decision will enable the hotel to better respond to guests' changing expectations, putting management and staff at the heart of operations.

Re-establishing the hotel as an independent property will make it more agile, giving it full control over spending and budget priorities, including allowing for greater levels of local procurement which will ultimately benefit the surrounding communities and local economy.

Standing on 100 hectares of land on the doorstep of the world-renowned Kruger National Park, the Kruger Gate Hotel currently offers 145 guest rooms.

The client mix of the hotel, which enjoys consistently high occupancy levels year-round, now includes many more digital nomads - people taking advantage of the opportunities that remote work offers while enjoying a 'work-cation'. The additional flexibility that self-catering facilities represent is part of the Kruger Gate Hotel's adaptation to the 'new normal' and of the new, independent thinking. As part of our upgrade plan, we intend to build additional self-catering homes that will be purposely built to blend into our natural surroundings.

## Experiential traveller demands

With relaxed Covid-19 protocols in many countries and no more protocols in place in others, there is the expectation of a higher demand for experiential holidays which provide the opportunity to connect with nature. At the same time, exceptional culinary and dining experiences are important to guests who are looking for extra sensory stimulation, or, perhaps the ultimate in relaxation by a pool or in the spa.

The exceptionally high international operating standards of Marriott are a legacy from which the Kruger Gate Hotel will always benefit, but deflagging now allows for a greater level of personal service from a staff complement that will feel the shift to a greater sense of family.

Like many other businesses and sectors, we have been forced to relook what we offer and both change or add to our

services in order to meet the needs of tourists who the pandemic has fundamentally and irrevocably changed.

Providing value for money and once-in-a-lifetime, unforgettable experiences is what we have always strived to do. However, more than ever before, we are sensitive to what the world has gone through, what our industry has gone through and, more locally, what our own people suffered during these past two years. But, with challenges come opportunities and at the Kruger Gate Hotel, we have taken the many lessons that living through the pandemic taught us on board and are committed to implementing changes and improvements that acknowledge new travel trends and that will benefit guests, management and staff alike.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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