

Why 2024 will be the year of tourism FDI in South Africa

By [Clinton Thom](#)

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The dawn of 2024 brings with it a palpable sense of optimism in South Africa's tourism and hospitality industry. Building on the momentum gained in 2023, the sector is set to experience a transformative year. This surge is evident in the significant increase in reservations from the UK and USA, largely attributed to the new direct flight routes from Cape Town to the USA.



Source: 4045 via [Freepik](#)

At the time of the announcement, James Vos, the Mayoral Member for Economic Growth and Tourism at the City of Cape Town described this development as a “big boost” for the tourism and hospitality industry in the city.

“The Delta route comes on top of the United Airlines announcement that it will be resuming direct flights between Cape Town and Newark/New York in June 2022, ahead of their initial schedule,” he [said at the time](#). Since then, the Western Cape’s October Tourism Report for 2023 indicated a 57% increase in international passenger traffic, signalling a renewed global interest in South Africa as a premier travel destination.

Facilitating tourism growth

The initiation of direct flights between Cape Town and the USA has opened new avenues for international tourism, significantly reducing travel time and enhancing convenience for American travellers. This development has not only facilitated an easier flow of tourists but also stimulated interest in South Africa's diverse travel offerings.

[Recent data](#) from Stats SA showed South Africa received more than 7.5 million international travellers by November 2023, with tourist arrivals from the Americas showing a 44% growth between January and November last year compared to the year before.

Likewise, the sustained increase in visitors from the UK can be seen as a testament to South Africa’s enduring appeal in the European market as the country welcomed more than 1 million tourists from Europe in the same period. Among European arrivals, the UK remained the dominant market followed by Germany and the Netherlands. The data also showed

an increase of more than 80% in arrivals from Russia.

Benefits for SA's tourism sector

This influx of international visitors is expected to bring a fresh wave of economic benefits and cultural exchange, further enriching South Africa's tourism landscape and economic activity in the sector.

In 2023, these tourists largely drove occupancy rates in accommodations across the country, with more than 50% of visitors being international tourists. Tailoring offerings to local preferences, such as family-friendly packages, weekend getaways, and special events, continues to be a successful strategy for maintaining a steady stream of domestic tourism.

International travellers to South Africa are [spoiled for choice](#), with a variety of landscapes, climates, and vacation options across the country. These range from the vast Karoo to the lush and mountainous Great Drakensberg area, to the many coastal options available across the country with most travellers setting their sights on the Mother City.

Experiential travel and sustainability

As we navigate through 2024, the adaptation and innovation of businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector will play an important role in their success. One of the key drivers will be to offer unique experiences. [National Geographic](#) believes that experiential travel might become one of the biggest travel trends for this year. “Experiential travel usually delves deeper into a given destination, ensuring visitors can experience it as authentically as possible. As such, tours tend to focus on less-touristy spots,” the magazine said.

The allure of unique, authentic experiences cannot be overstated. For international tourists, this might mean wildlife safaris that showcase South Africa's rich biodiversity, cultural tours that explore the country's heritage, or adventure sports set against stunning natural backdrops. For local tourists, the focus might be on undiscovered gems within their own country, such as off-the-beaten-path destinations or local festivals that celebrate South African traditions and cuisines.

This is evidenced by statistics released in October last year by [Mireille Wenger](#), the Western Cape's Provincial Minister of Finance and Economic Opportunities, which recorded the top five highest year-on-year growth rates recorded for a few of the Western Cape's national parks and reserves such as Anysberg Nature Reserve (867%), Stony Point Eco Venue (109%), Walker Bay Nature Reserve (65%), Table Mountain National Park: Boulders (47%) and Table Mountain National Park: Cape of Good Hope (31%).

Focusing on experiential travel and adventures in South Africa, it also highlights that sustainability in the travel industry is no longer a mere trend but a necessity. Eco-friendly initiatives can range from reducing waste and conserving water to supporting conservation projects. Such practices not only appeal to environmentally conscious travellers but also ensure the long-term viability of the tourism sites themselves.

Integration of Technology

Another trend that will continue to grow in 2024 is the [integration of technology](#) in tourism, which is revolutionising the way travellers interact with destinations and also helping with the recovery of the industry post-pandemic. Efficient online booking systems, virtual customer service, and mobile applications can simplify travel planning and provide seamless experiences for tourists.

By capitalising on the trends of the past year and implementing forward-thinking strategies, the industry is well-positioned to offer an unparalleled travel experience. From the bustling streets of Johannesburg to the serene landscapes of the Western Cape, South Africa is ready to welcome the world with its unique blend of beauty, culture, and adventure.

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