

Building a solid presence with tourism storytelling on Instagram

 By [Cari Van Wyk](#)

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Social media has changed the way travellers travel, companies market destinations, and how services are delivered in the travel and hospitality market. From restaurants and hotels to tourism boards and countries, everyone has started to tap into various social media channels to attract the attention of would-be travellers - using images and videos to get eyeballs and footfalls on their fair shores.

We had a chat with Craig Rodney, the one man show behind the [@SouthAfrica](#) Instagram account, about tourism storytelling on social media, the value of social media as a destination marketing tool, and why it is important for tourism boards and countries to embrace and use social media effectively.



Craig Rodney

Tell us about your journey on Instagram

Craig Rodney: I first started using Instagram back in November 2010, shortly after they launched. At first, I thought it was a photo editing app where you could add cool filters and then share to Facebook. It took me a while to realise it was its own social network.

In 2013, I started craving a passion project that showed off South Africa and when I got my hands on the [@southafrica](#) username in March that year, my project started. I used the account to share the best photos of South Africa that were being shared on Instagram. My commitment was to find and post one picture every day for 365 days – and that's exactly what I did.

Three years later - I haven't missed a single day.

📌 *How do you go about curating for the @SouthAfrica account, what is your process?*

Rodney: Finding photos used to be quite painful, but it has become a lot easier now that the account is getting more popular. The top two ways are by going through all the pictures that tag @southafrica, and also by looking through #ThisIsSouthAfrica.

I also use my personal account to follow as many of the top local photographers as possible because then their photos find me, which is great.

📌 *How many posts come through a day on average?*

Rodney: The account gets tagged in about 100 photos each day which is enough that I'll always find great pics, but not so much that I can't quickly go through them.

📌 *Why do you think #ThisIsSouthAfrica is so popular?*

Rodney: The hashtag gets promoted every time I post a photo so I think people have become used to using it, and people also enjoy having their pictures featured because they reach a broader audience. So they'll use the hashtag and tag the account on all their top pics.

As the hashtag grows it loses value though - the more popular a hashtag becomes, the more it gets targeted by spam, so as they grow, they become less useful for finding pictures. As such I prefer that people tag the account.

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Sunsets in Franschhoek. Photo by @gavman18 #ThisIsSouthAfrica

A photo posted by SouthAfrica (@southafrica) on Jul 31, 2016 at 12:02am PDT

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Star gazing in Elandslaagte, KZN. Photo by @andyygross #ThisIsSouthAfrica

A photo posted by SouthAfrica (@southafrica) on Aug 16, 2016 at 9:24pm PDT

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Taking in the beauty of the Blyde River Canyon. Photo by @miklasmanneke #ThisIsSouthAfrica

A photo posted by SouthAfrica (@southafrica) on Aug 1, 2016 at 9:19pm PDT

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Cape Town stadium swimming in clouds. Photo by @goku_explores #ThisIsSouthAfrica

A photo posted by SouthAfrica (@southafrica) on Jul 15, 2016 at 9:36pm PDT

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❏ **What role can Instagram, and apps like it, play for organisations? Why is it important that establishments, destinations, tourism companies, etc. successfully tap into Instagram?**

Rodney: Instagram is 90% an inspiration platform which is what differentiates it from the other social networks. It isn't going to drive massive web traffic to your site, but it can inspire millions of people if you're able to connect with them in a meaningful way.

Any products that are inspiration based, especially tourism destinations, stand to benefit massively from building a solid Instagram presence. People aren't looking for pictures of your fluffy pillows or buffet, they want to be inspired to travel to your area and experience life.

❏ **How do Instagram members use the app when it comes to travelling and how should that inform and influence tourism strategies?**

Rodney: From what I've seen through the @southafrica account, people are looking for adventure. They want to be inspired to create and share their own stories when they visit South Africa, to experience their own versions of what's on offer.

I'm always amazed how often people will go way back through the photos on the account and tag their travel buddies and build an itinerary of everything they want to do through the photos. South Africa is a bucket-list destination for many people, and they'll figure out how to get here if we just show them why they should come and what they should do.

❏ **Are there any pitfalls to avoid, any challenges that potential and existing Instagram users should be aware of? What advice would you give people and organisations that are looking to use Instagram for business?**

Rodney: If inspiration is a part of your sales strategy then Instagram can be amazing, but if not, you should be critical of what it can do for your business. The only way to link people out of Instagram is via your bio which isn't a solid mechanism for driving traffic to other sites. You also need to be specific about building an engaged audience that represents your target market. Having a big following is irrelevant if you can't inspire them to act, or if they're the wrong people. Now that Instagram has enabled deeper analytics on accounts it's easier to track this to ensure you're building the right audience.

ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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