

# SA setting the benchmark in e-Tourism

The 6th Annual E-Tourism Africa Summit took place in Cape Town from 9-10 September 2013, to work with, and show, the tourism industry how best to take full advantage of the fast-growing digital and social media ecosystem.

The Summit was presented by e-Tourism Frontiers in partnership with South African Tourism who are globally recognised for their ground-breaking approach to genuine integrated marketing within the travel and tourism sector.

"The online environment has yielded phenomenal results for our destination," says Thulani Nzima, chief executive officer at South African Tourism. "Our organisation is proud to be associated with the E-Tourism Africa Summit. This event has become a highlight in the tourism calendar. It's exciting to note how receptive the South African trade is to using digital to grow their businesses."

## Bringing in digital

"A number of years ago we took the decision to imbue digital into the core of all our marketing efforts, and investment, as part of a deliberate strategy to position South African Tourism as a leading destination marketing organisation, that has high levels of direct engagement with our core markets," adds Nzima.

Today, South Africa has a very dominant and valued online presence on global travel platforms like TripAdvisor and WAYN.com. As an extension of this success, all online sales (via Expedia and affiliates) now proudly exceed R770 million annually.

Another digital asset that performs extremely well is the South African Tourism website ([www.southafrica.net](http://www.southafrica.net) with associated in-country sites), attracting over 3.2 million online visits a year, influencing many people to travel to our shores, thanks to a well defined content strategy that's geo-targeted at specific interests of consumers in 18 different markets around the world.

"It's all part of our determination to ensure our marketing investment is fully informed by research insights and is therefore consumer-centric, delivering the right information to the right person, in the right format, at the right time," Nzima says. It's a strategy that's paying dividends for South Africa, and for the South African travel trade.

## Booking online

In 2012 over 200,000 people booked their trips online to South Africa. These online purchases (inclusive of Expedia and other South African Tourism's Online Travel Agent partners) resulted in more than R790 million for our economy, and the industry. Of these 200 000 trips, more than 186, 000 were booked by international visitors. To illustrate this growth, the total

gross bookings from Expedia grew 11% to more than R505 million in the first six months of 2013.

"It's results like this that matter," Nzima says. "However, we don't only track the revenue, but also the accolades achieved along the way. In 2011 TripAdvisor users voted Cape Town Global Destination City of The Year, and this year Cape Town topped the TripAdvisor Rooms Service survey for the extraordinary value for money it offers visitors."

South Africa has the largest following of any destination on the social media travel community platform WAYN.com, supported by over 415 000 friends. When WAYN.com users were asked to vote a few months ago, they said South Africa was their 'Dream Destination of the World'.

## **Social media travel community**

South African Tourism's combined trade and consumer-facing Facebook pages and Twitter feeds have over 747,000 friends and followers. These people and businesses keep track of what's happening in South Africa, they look out for suggestions of new experiences, and they post stories and share pictures of their own South African holiday online for others to enjoy.

For South African Tourism, digital marketing also extends beyond websites and social media platforms. Other high-tech digital tools are also used to again improve the level of engagement between the tourism industry, like INDABA Connect. At INDABA this year the INDABA Connect Poken technology encouraged and facilitated over 12 000 connections and 286 000 virtual business cards that were exchanged between over 10 000 delegates.

The #MeetSouthAfrica Bloggers Conference that South African Tourism initiated at INDABA 2013 took digital marketing to new heights, firmly establishing the power of social media and reach of the blogosphere as crucial to gaining a competitive advantage on the destination world stage.

The Bloggers Conference hosted 15 bloggers from around the world to an unforgettable South African holiday, and resulted in more than 161 million opportunities for people around the world to be exposed to the South African brand. The project (so far) has already reached over three million people on Facebook and delivered more than R34 million in advertising value.

"Digital marketing continues to evolve at lightning speed," Nzima says. "Our commitment is to remain on the cusp of this curve and engage meaningfully with people, listening to them and responding accordingly. South African Tourism is determined to go where our consumers go and to be the benchmark of destination marketing success."

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