

UNWTO World Conference puts spotlight on sustainable tourism in the Cape

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has invited Cape Town and the Western Cape - which will be represented by Wesgro's chief marketing officer, Judy Lain - to take part in a panel discussion on the importance of the circular economy for sustainable tourism development during its second World Conference on Smart Destinations taking place in Oviedo, Spain.



HONGQI ZHANG via [123RF](#)

Lain will be joined by researchers, entrepreneurs and other tourism stakeholders from Germany, Slovenia and Finland to discuss how new technologies can be exploited to support the entire tourism ecosystem in its transition from a linear to a more circular production and consumption model, fostering restoration, regeneration and re-use.

Having gained extensive experience in the first quarter of this year as to how to respond to the severe water crisis, Cape Town and the Western Cape has already taken steps to build a more sustainable tourist destination.

"January 2018 marks the decisive moment when as a province, we embraced the opportunity to change our relationship with water forever. We started to future-proof our homes, our businesses, our tourists, our towns - the result of which has created the Cape as a water resilient destination and world leaders in sustainability," explains Lain as she reflects on the collective efforts between citizens, government and businesses over the first quarter of this year.

Water usage barriers

Incorporating digital technology into the visitor experience, Lain explains how one of the biggest concerns from tourists was that they were and/ or are going to use water meant for locals, with the reverse concern from locals that visitors are going to consume too much water.

In response to this barrier, Wesgro in partnership with Flow developed a water off-set tool called [My Waterfoot Print](#). The tool allows visitors to the Cape to calculate their daily water usage, then offset this usage by donating money towards a

water conservation project.

Incorporating visitors into the #WaterWiseTourism solution, Lain adds: "Through the tool, visitors to our water-scarce destination have been incentivised to check their usage, while experiencing our unparalleled natural beauty, award-winning food and wine, rich culture and heritage, and world-famous landmarks."

Climate change a new reality

UNWTO secretary general, Zurab Pololikashvili acknowledged the efforts undertaken by the Cape's tourism sector commenting: "We recognise the huge efforts that South Africa, especially the Cape Town local authorities, are undertaking in addressing the water situation and the inclusive approach that has been taken throughout the campaign in raising awareness for the end users and tourists in becoming more responsible."

With climate change being a new reality that will affect more and more cities around the world in coming years, Wesgro CEO, Tim Harris commented: "The Cape Town Model' for dealing with climate change shows how tourism can be an important part of the solution. We are honoured to be invited to share our initiatives and acquire new knowledge on the esteemed platform created by the UNWTO World Conference on Smart Destinations 2018."

Minister of economic opportunities, Alan Winde added "The Western Cape is positioning itself at the forefront of the green economy, and there is a lot of scope for our tourism sector to become more involved in the circular model. Cape Town has become a global example for drastic water reduction during the drought, and we hope to develop our tourism industry to be resilient and sustainable in order to grow and protect it, and the many important jobs that it creates, going forward."

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