

A look in the crystal ball - what can we expect for travel in 2018?

The Association of Southern African Travel Agents (ASATA) lifts the veil on which destinations will emerge as the most popular in the new year and which will be the main trends and inspirations that will inspire South African travellers in 2018.



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Visa-Free destinations rule

Visa-free destinations will be a popular choice for budget-conscious South African travellers who are likely to be deterred by exorbitant visa costs, according to Monica Horn, product manager, Harvey World Travel. Horn explains that the rate of exchange will continue to have an impact on spending, which is why we'll see more South Africans opting for destinations in Africa, the Indian Ocean Islands or even the Far East.

Karen Donkin, iGo Travel, agrees and says the weak rate of exchange will see travellers prompt South Africans to explore their own country or travel within Africa.

Trafalgar reports that Russia has seen a strong growth amongst South African travellers, partly due to the fact that South Africans no longer need visas to visit Russia. "For 2018, TTC has even added a new trip to the destination and are introducing the eight-day 'Highlights of St Petersburg and Moscow'," says Theresa Szejwallo, MD The Travel Corporation (TTC).

Shopping around for a good deal will be common

While head of Kulula Holidays Desmond O'Connor says he doesn't see significant changes in travel for 2018, he foresees that the drive for value deals and cost-effective travel will be the key decision maker for most South African.

Says O'Connor: "We expect **booking trends to shorten** in terms of when people book compared to when they travel, and people will continue to shop around (online and offline) for the best deal. We have seen the booking trends shorten substantially in the last 24 months and people are booking a lot closer to the planned departure date than previously."

According to O'Connor, travellers can expect a huge drive on activities, value adds and benefits in an attempt of travel sellers to differentiate value and try and upsell.

Wellness travel is the next big thing

Wellness travel will be the next big thing in travel, according to Club Travel's Tatum Vermaak. She explains Club Travel has seen an uptick in demand for sporting and wellness travel.

Szejwallo agrees and says this niche is expanding 50% faster than the overall tourism industry. The definition of wellness travel is also broadening and is no longer restricted to spa treatments and pampering. Says Szejwallo: "South African wellness travellers want the 'real' thing when they travel and want to connect with locals and find their 'happy place'."

The Maldives is expected to become a popular island getaway

With Maldivian Airlines announcing they will soon start offering direct flights to South Africa, Vermaak predicts the Maldives will become a popular island getaway for South African travellers. "Direct flights from South Africa will make this destination a lot more affordable for South African travellers," says Vermaak, adding that depending on the airfares, the new flights could propel the Maldives as a value-for-money option.

O'Connor also foresees that the Maldives will become an attractive destination. He says: "The usual Indian Ocean islands remain strong, as does the far East and I think these areas will remain the key leisure markets for South Africans. However, we do see potential for the Maldives to grow from an international perspective."

South Africans will take to the seas in 2018

Cruising will also be a popular holiday option for South Africans in 2018, says Vermaak, who adds that the cruising industry is growing at a fast pace. She foresees that cruising will start to take off amongst the younger generations with products such as U by Uniworld, which caters for 21 to 45-year-olds. She says: "The ship has DJs, rooftop lounges and adventurous excursions."

Horn agrees and says that 2018 will be all about "cruising cruising cruising!" She explains that there are a great number of different cruise liners available, and the trick for travel agents will be to **match the right cruise line to the right customer**.

Groups will be popular for leisure and corporate travellers

Group travel is becoming more popular as people are attracted to the hassle-free element of this kind of travel, says Szejwallo. "Travellers don't want to risk anything going wrong with their reservation or face having to pay more as a result of the volatility of the rand."

Guided holidays will also gain popularity as an option for staff incentives, as well as for corporates who are looking for a leisure city break. Says Szejwallo: "Often corporates have limited time before or after their business trips and by taking a City Explorer to London, Paris, Berlin or Madrid, they can enjoy these business hubs for between six to eight days without

having to worry. The appeal is that they don't have to 'pack and unpack' as their entire stay is in one city."

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