

How innovative solutions are reshaping the African travel industry in a post-pandemic world

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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During a presentation at WTM Africa 2023, which took place from 3-5 April at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC), Christy Tawii, research manager at Euromonitor International, highlighted innovative solutions for the African travel industry in a post-pandemic era.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

As the pandemic has brought about significant changes in the way people travel, the industry is adopting innovative solutions to adapt to the evolving preferences of travellers.

Here, Tawii shares with us how the pandemic has changed the way people travel and how innovative solutions are reshaping the African travel industry.

She also highlights the emergence of technology-driven travel solutions, tapping into data for enhanced tourism experiences, blended travel, reinventing domestic tourism, and niche tourism as key solutions to meet travellers' evolving preferences.

How has the pandemic changed the way people travel, and what opportunities does this present for the African travel industry?

With over 100 million jobs at risk and nearly 1 billion trips lost as a result of Covid-19, the travel industry has undergone significant changes since 2020. Three challenging years later, the travel sector is finally showing signs of recovery, although it is still not back to pre-2020 levels. Africa, in particular, has seen a 50% increase in international arrivals by 2022.

Despite this growth, the pandemic has fundamentally transformed the industry. Covid has changed the way we look at travel and the world. Today's travellers are looking for authentic experiences, a sense of connection to nature, and an appreciation for the world around them.

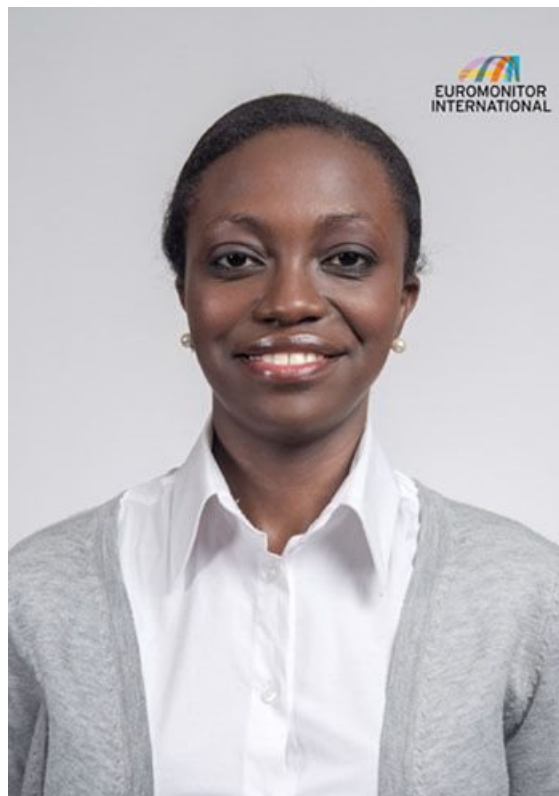
With its unique offerings, Africa is ideally positioned to capitalise on its inherent strengths as a destination and cater to travellers' shifting preferences.

■ How is the African travel industry being transformed by emerging innovative solutions?

Technology-driven travel solutions: Digitalisation is transforming the travel industry, especially with tourists now having higher expectations and demanding unique experiences. The use of digital platforms, mobile apps, artificial intelligence, and data analytics will enable travel businesses to provide personalised experiences and real-time information. As a result, these tools improve the overall travel experience and help businesses remain competitive.

Through digital platforms, travellers can now take a quick look at a destination and get a taste of their next holiday. The integration of technology in business models across tourism sectors is set to be crucial to remain relevant because those tools are future-proof, consumer-centric, and experiential.

Travel operators can capitalise on digital platforms to offer potential travellers a glimpse of their destinations, providing a pre-experience taste that entices them to visit. By leveraging digitalisation, businesses can gather valuable data to better understand their customers and improve their offerings.



Christy Tawii, research manager, Euromonitor International



Tapping into data for enhanced tourism experiences

Wynand Smit 2 Aug 2018



Embracing various digital campaigns, such as TikTok, live streaming, and social media swaps, allows operators to reach a wider and more diverse audience. Through technology, travel operators are leveraging digitalisation to get data from travellers by using tools such as big data and analytics to identify patterns and preferences by collecting and analysing data on customers' past travel history, interests, demographics, and online behaviour.

They can then use this information to create personalised recommendations for destinations, accommodations, activities, and promotions. Travel businesses are leveraging digital platforms, mobile apps, and artificial intelligence to offer personalised experiences and real-time information to travellers. This includes AI-driven recommendations, AR/VR-enhanced exploration, and data-driven personalisation, which enhance the overall travel experience.

Blended travel: Blended travel is currently being embraced by the travel industry as it includes many emerging ways that travellers are leveraging flexible and hybrid working models to work and travel at the same time.

Key areas of focus that are gaining traction include offering leisure add-ons to traditional business trips, organising corporate retreats for team-building and relaxation, accommodating digital nomads and freelance workers seeking unique experiences, promoting work-from-anywhere packages for location-independent professionals, and creating workcation offerings that blend work and relaxation.

By strategically tapping into these growing trends, travel operators are successfully engaging with the expanding market segment of travellers who combine work and leisure.



5 ways tourism businesses can attract more local travellers

16 Mar 2023



Reinventing domestic tourism: In recent years, the travel industry has faced challenges that have opened the eyes of many African countries to the benefits of domestic tourism. When international borders are closed during crises, domestic travellers become the primary source of revenue, reviving domestic tourism.

As a result, ongoing efforts are being made to reinvent domestic tourism. Due to this, tailored travel packages, as well as regional promotion, are becoming increasingly popular. By offering tailored travel packages, ensuring accessibility, and ensuring affordability, businesses can encourage locals to explore their own countries and build industry resilience by promoting regional destinations.

Niche tourism: Traveller profiles are evolving, and traditional attractions are giving way to more experiential activities in Africa's niche tourism market. By enhancing and promoting these offerings in a way that resonates with travellers' expectations and desires, the key challenge now is to effectively attract travellers. As traveller preferences continue to change, tourism presents numerous opportunities for generating new revenue streams.

Businesses are re-evaluating and adapting their offerings and strategies to take advantage of these trends. In the case of Africa, it is about moving away from only being a safari destination, as we see more niche tourism offerings. As a result, countries are positioning themselves according to their strengths, including wine tourism, medical tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, and sports tourism.

Rather than reinventing the wheel, players should promote their unique selling points; for example, what do you have in Zambia, ask what we have to offer. These innovative solutions can help African travel businesses meet unique challenges, remain competitive, foster sustainable growth, and improve customer service.

■ ***How can African countries work together to promote tourism in the region and attract more visitors post-pandemic?***

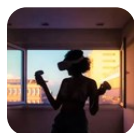
Regional tourism can be promoted, and more visitors can be attracted post-pandemic through collaborative innovation. Developing strategic partnerships with stakeholders, including regional initiatives, can help Africa resurrect and reshape its tourism industry.

Consumer behaviour is changing, and operations can be integrated across borders in order to achieve this goal. In order to offer comprehensive travel packages that cater to diverse traveller preferences, travel operators should seek strategic partnerships with other stakeholders, including accommodation providers, airlines, and local attractions.

■ ***How can technology contribute to rethinking African travel, and what are the most promising advancements in this field?***

Technology can play a crucial role in reimagining African travel and tourism through mobile connectivity, travel apps, data-driven personalisation, and virtual and augmented reality.

By enhancing accessibility, offering customised experiences, and enabling businesses to showcase attractions, African travel and tourism can be transformed, resulting in increased customer retention and customer attraction. Travel and tourism, for example, stand to be revolutionised by the metaverse, a virtual reality space where users interact with digital environments in real-time. In Africa, a region with rich cultural heritage and natural wonders, the metaverse offers a unique opportunity to enhance its tourism sectors.



Tourism and the metaverse: Towards widespread use of virtual travel?

Naima Aïdi 17 Aug 2022



Travel operators can capitalise on this trend by creating immersive virtual tours and experiences of popular tourist destinations, historical sites, and cultural events, allowing potential tourists to explore the region without physically travelling.

A local company is taking the authentic South African experience to anyone in the world - from the comfort of their couch. Virtual Reality Durban has already begun digitising the city by offering authentic local experiences to anyone in the world through the power of VR. The company has digitally recreated various highlights of the province and the rest of the country, including the Reed dance, a zip-line tour in the Drakensberg, a surfing experience on one of the city's beaches and an aerial tour of King Shaka International Airport and the Dube Tradeport, among others.

■ ***In what ways could African travel operators promote sustainable tourism while also increasing visitor numbers and revenue?***

Beyond mere environmental compliance, sustainable solutions are increasingly becoming a differentiating factor in the travel industry. Based on the results of the Voice of the Industry for Travel survey, many travel operators are increasing their focus on sustainability. The same applies to travellers, who in some cases are willing to pay more for sustainability. Operators should ask themselves: How sustainable are their tourism models? In terms of sustainability, do they offer what tourists want?

Sustainability doesn't always mean paying more. Operators can, for example, offer travellers the option of skipping daily towel changes, thereby contributing to water conservation. Most people reuse towels at home rather than changing them every day. In addition, travel businesses can offer eco-friendly alternatives, such as bicycles instead of golf carts for transportation within a resort or golf course.

Travel operators can appeal to a growing audience of eco-conscious travellers while maintaining profitability and contributing to long-term sustainability by incorporating sustainable solutions and practices into their offerings.

■ ***How can Africa learn from other regions' successful approaches to navigating the post-pandemic travel landscape?***

African travel operators can learn from other regions by focusing on adaptability and resilience in the face of changing market conditions, developing domestic tourism to boost local economies and create tailored experiences, fostering strategic partnerships and regional cooperation to jointly promote the continent's unique offerings, leveraging technology to enhance customer experiences and streamline operations, and embracing diverse, inclusive, and experiential travel to cater to a wide range of traveller preferences and showcase the rich cultural heritage of Africa.

■ ***What are some of the most exciting destinations in Africa that are poised for growth in the coming years, and what factors will contribute to their success?***

African destinations are poised for growth in the coming years, offering unique attractions and experiences. Destinations are diversifying their offerings and no longer focusing only on traditional attractions. To mention a few, known for its mountain gorillas and stunning national parks, Rwanda is committed to sustainability, safety, and political stability.

To attract business tourism, Rwanda is aggressively exploring the MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) segment. As a hub of West African culture and history, Ghana has gained international attention for its 'Year of Return' and investment in tourism infrastructure. Besides the Serengeti National Park, Mount Kilimanjaro, and Zanzibar's pristine beaches, Tanzania has made commitments to promote tourism and improve infrastructure.

In spite of its diverse landscapes, rich history, and acclaimed wine regions, South Africa continues to be a popular tourism destination because of its wealth of services and well-established infrastructure. The growth of these destinations will be driven by factors such as unique attractions, infrastructure investments, sustainable practices, and improved safety and political stability.

■ ***How can African travel businesses adapt to changing consumer preferences and expectations, and what***

strategies can they use to stay competitive?

Travel businesses in Africa can adapt to changing consumer preferences and expectations in the post-pandemic world by implementing several key strategies. In order to cater to different traveller interests and niche markets, they should diversify and be inclusive. Reaching new audiences and driving revenue growth is possible through blended and niche experiences that combine immersive physical and virtual elements.

In order to create authentic travel experiences, companies should emphasise authenticity and simplicity in their core values, such as wellness, nature, and self-development. To deliver socially and environmentally responsible experiences, sustainable stewardship is crucial to the tourism industry's transformation. In order to provide a seamless and personalised travel experience, digital innovations are being embraced, including emerging technologies such as the metaverse and augmented reality/virtual reality.

The African tourism industry can be revived and reshaped jointly by fostering strategic partnerships with various stakeholders, including accommodation providers, airlines, and local attractions, by responding to changing consumer behaviours and creating comprehensive travel packages through collaborative innovation.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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