

# Tourism's time in the spotlight

By [Danny Bryer](#)

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Over 1,000 exhibitors enjoy the attention of thousands of attendees including over 1,400 buyers from 68 countries at Africa's Travel Indaba 2018, which takes place in Durban this month. This iteration of Indaba is an essential one for the continent's growing tourism sector. Investor confidence is at an all-time high across Africa, but the continent faces challenges that are particular to the region, too.



Image Source: [@DurbanICC](#)

## Developing tourism in developing nations

Indaba is a tourism trade B2B affair, but tourism in the African context is closely linked to infrastructural development within the individual countries that make up the continent. From the digital revolution that's taking place across Africa, where the rate of connectivity is faster than any other continent to the upgrading of airports, road networks and developments in the banking and retail sector, the shift is a rapid one. Further challenges include fledgling democracies creating an environment conducive to cross-border trade, since many nations have emerged from decades of political turmoil. Taking ownership of natural resources (oil, minerals, etc.) and ensuring that these form a healthy part of the economy has also taken time.

“ SA will be the big emerging market of 2018 – Goldman Sachs ”

In the same way that Japan rebuilt itself after WWII, Rwanda's path to development is a remarkable success story that has seen it overcome immense challenges to becoming one of the liveliest economies in East Africa. The question is, though, where does travel and tourism fit into this mix?

Travel growth is two-pronged; there's business travel, whether independently or as part of conventions, meetings, conferences and events, and then there's leisure travel, the latter coming into its own as more and more middle-class Africans are seeing the value in exploring. That's where Indaba fits in.

Across Africa, developing tourism is linked to trade developments, since both feed into the creation of investor confidence. For example, Protea Hotels by Marriott's African pipeline for hotels will see over sixty properties come to life over the next few years across a variety of African nations where the demand for a recognised brand is valued. At Indaba, attendees get

access to unique business networking opportunities and contacts from around the world, bringing a global market to SA's doorstep. It's not just about showcasing destinations, but the value-rich interaction that can lead to collaborations, partnerships and trade agreements.

“ Day 2 of [#Indaba2018](#) starts now! Let's get down to business and start telling our stories to the world.

[#AfricaMovesYou pic.twitter.com/tPMloKBx9Q](#)— Travel Indaba (@travel\_indaba) [May 9, 2018](#) ”

This is what contributes to growth across the sector, rather than the success and growth of individual businesses. The event itself is beneficial to the host city, and traffic through King Shaka International Airport is dense; an upswing in occupancy rates at places of accommodation is a welcome boost, as is the additional spike in the tourism-related economy in retail and restaurants. As a host city, it's the perfect opportunity to showcase what's on offer.

## Sustainability, tech take the floor

At the heart of this year's event is the question of sustainability in tourism: if Africa is seeking to grow tourism, sustainability measures must be in place alongside development plans in order to give the sector longevity.

Cape Town's watershed moment of coming close to running out of water prior to emergency measures being put in place illustrates the need to ensure that all aspects of sustainable tourism are addressed in the development process across the country, from preserving natural resources to ensuring that communities aren't negatively impacted by tourism. It would be short-sighted of African nations to ignore the need for this. Focusing strictly on profitability without investing in sustainability will negatively impact the opportunity for long-term growth.

At Indaba 2018, tech in tourism is a central feature. As mentioned, Africa is enjoying its new connectedness and the attendant opportunities this provides, so Indaba is the perfect platform to introduce how technology, from apps to eco-friendly innovation can boost a response from the marketplace. Technology can lead to cost-effective marketing methods such as social media platforms, ideal for a young travel market that needs to count the cents when it comes to marketing campaigns.

A lack of resources isn't all bad – it can lead to cutting-edge innovation as creative people come up with solutions for the African context, one that's quite different from the developed world and one that gives the continent a special kind of fresh energy, one that appeals to visitors. Countries in Africa are like no other countries on the planet. This is the chance for places such as Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Rwanda, Nigeria and others to join South Africa in saying: "Come and check out what's new and exciting in our emerging markets, you won't be disappointed."

## ABOUT DANNY BRYER

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