

Trade shows and travel to Africa: What South Africa's top source markets reveal

By [Chelsey Hale](#)

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On Monday, 23 August, Africa Travel Week (ATW) led a virtual round table discussion with a selection of their hosted buyers pooled from South Africa's top source markets.



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"The aim of the session was to gauge the overall perception and sentiment around travel to Africa, but also to understand how we can support our buyers during the build up to WTM Africa, our flagship show set to take place from 9-11 April 2021 at the Cape Town International Convention Centre," says Megan Oberholzer, portfolio director: travel, tourism and creative industries at Reed Exhibitions.

"Instead of a survey or webinar, the session was run as an interactive meeting, encouraging honest feedback and insights from 18 hosted buyers based in destinations ranging from the US, the UK, the Netherlands, Norway, France, Argentina, India, and Nigeria," she said.

The round table delved into a number of relevant business issues, from the confidence levels of their customers, to concerns around upfront investment costs and insurance.

"Most of my clients have written off 2020 when it comes to international travel but are keen to go as soon as possible," explained Andy Higgs, the managing director from The Grown Up Travel Company in Norway. "The problem is not South Africa and other countries being open, it's that we can't travel from Europe because we have a travel advisory in place, which prevents travel insurance and I can't recommend travel to Africa if clients can't get insurance."

Another important point discussed at length is the evident willingness of the buyers' source markets to travel to Africa, but airlift as being a major challenge.

Gustavo Garcia-Schwindt, the managing director from Viajes Memorables, an Argentinean agency, added that his clients have expressed interest to go to Africa because of its more remote offerings, but that connecting flights out of South America are an issue: "I've had requests for South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda but currently there are no flight connections. Right now, connections for international travel are in Europe, which adds substantially to flight times."

The discussions also highlighted the importance of opening international travel in multiple African destinations as many of their clients travelling to the region are not only coming to visit one country.

"In terms of attending Africa Travel Week in April 2021, the feedback was unanimous in that they want to attend the physical event to do business – and that virtual meetings right now are purely out of necessity," explained Oberholzer.

"Africa is my main destination and I depend on WTM Africa to secure business for the year ahead," said Jayesh Ashar, managing director of Pearl Travels in India. "It is essential to talk to my suppliers face-to-face and to discuss how we can solve problems. For contracting purposes, virtual meetings are always a second choice. It's the buzz of the show and that marketplace feel that's a major drawcard and what keeps you going and makes you feel a part of something bigger."

The roundtable feedback also emphasised how live trade shows have many more years to live in the market, providing a space for informal and spontaneous meetings which lead to greater business opportunities.

To emphasise the sentiment for physical events, a recent WTM Global survey sent out to 26,000 WTM 2019 Trade Visitors, Buyers Club, and Media around the likelihood of attending WTM London this November showed that about 7 out of 10 are confident to visit the face-to-face event, and 64% consider their WTM experience valuable to their business.

"Our international buyers also highlighted the fact that they always combine their attendance at the show with a personal trip to experience African products. In doing so they can show their customers what it's really like to travel to Africa, especially during Covid-19, and to offer reassurance," explained Oberholzer.

As an additional resource for buyers leading up to next year's show, ATW recently entered the virtual space with the launch of Africa Travel Week Connect.

The online platform provides updated news and resources, information on exhibitors' products and niche sectors like luxury travel, MICE, and LGBTQ+ travel. They are also currently promoting their upcoming meetings and masterclasses virtual offering launching this September which is also tourism month.

ABOUT CHELSEY HALE

Having lived in Thailand, South Korea, and the U.K, Chelsey finally returned home to South Africa in 2016 where she now sails the adventurous tides of travel content writing. While she has a special focus on the travel industry, she also creates written content across multiple industries. She enjoys all things related to travel, spending much of her time looking for a great news hook and working alongside the team at Big Ambitions. Email: chelsey@chelseyhale.com

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