

# What the millennial market wants from the travel industry

By [Judiet Barnes](#)

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Keeping up with global trends is hugely important for South African companies involved in the tourism industry. If we want to encourage more foreigners to visit our shores, we have to listen to what they want. That's why I attended the World Travel Market trade event in London in November this year.



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While spending most of the time at the Thebe Tourism Group stand may have meant that I wasn't able to listen to the speakers at the event, it certainly gave me the opportunity to interact with people from the trade, with influencers and with media, and this has provided me with some important insights about how we need to take things forward in South Africa.

A big takeout for me was the power of the millennial generation to influence what tourism will look like in the years ahead. The demands of this generation are quite clear, and we need to tailor our offerings to address what these people are looking for – not to the exclusion of the needs of other generations and their preferences, but we do need to develop products that cater to them. After all, this is definitely the generation of travellers we will be hosting over the next 20 to 40 years, so our strategies for the decades to come must be informed by their wants.

*“ A destination that truly aims to attract the millennial market will identify what it is that makes the destination truly unique - and then capitalise on it to create experiences that can be found only there. ”*

The millennial market currently spends around \$200bn on travel annually, according to Forbes magazine, and this is set to increase significantly in the coming years. People of this generation travel far more regularly than their parents and grandparents do, so South African travel operators cannot ignore them if we seek to remain relevant in the global tourist market.

**The titbits I picked up at the World Travel Market about the millennial market are highlighted by two points:**

Firstly, a big factor that attracts millennials to a particular destination is how Instagrammable it is – in other words, **how visually appealing is the destination?**

**This is something that South Africa can certainly build on:** With our incredible natural beauty, with sea and river/dam vistas and spectacularly scenic mountains, South Africa is certainly a destination offering wonderful photo opportunities. So, let's bear this in mind when we upgrade a tourist sight – build platforms and bridges that allow for Insta-worthy scenic shots, create products which are unique and show African excellence worthy of the front page of a global design magazine, and don't forget to install signage that encourages visitors to geotag their photos when they post them.

## **Creating authentic, unique experiences**

A destination that truly aims to attract the millennial market will identify what it is that makes the destination truly unique - and then capitalise on it to create experiences that can be found only there. By way of example, there is a hotel in Africa that has understood this well: a giraffe greets guests by peeking through their high windows as they dine/lounge around. So, what can we single out in our attractions/ unique settings that will engage well with the millennial audience and be appreciated as an experience only to be found there?

**Our food service-providers also need to make sure their dishes match what's available elsewhere** - at the standard of the ones you see on MasterChef.

Sustainable and responsible tourism are other issues of importance to the millennial traveller. Again, these are factors we are already aware of in the South African tourism industry, so we should continue to focus on them – it's not an added benefit like it used to be seen as 10 or so years ago; responsible and sustainability of a tourism product has shifted to the expected – the centre of operations in tourism businesses. Without recognising the shift in how responsible tourism is seen and the importance of looking after the environment and socio-economics, a very certain decline in attracting millennials will prevail.

Our CEO, Jerry Mabena, has spoken of a sustainable and responsible way of addressing the land redistribution debate in the country: rather than focusing on ownership of land, we should be looking at the way in which unused land can be converted into productive land through tourism initiatives that would provide for sustainable opportunities geared to take rural communities out of poverty. In the Drakensberg region of KwaZulu-Natal, for example, there is plenty of unutilised land in scenic mountain locations that could be converted into mountain resorts run by local people.

Through public-private partnerships, sustainable tourism ventures can be created. And, if we also focus on the responsible use of the pristine locations we bring tourists to, we will be addressing the millennials' need for responsible tourism.

So, we should ensure that, in our strategic planning for the future, we bring everything we plan back to what the millennial traveller is looking for – and then we must let these travellers know what we are doing.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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