

A portrait of a woman with short, reddish-brown hair and bangs. She has bright blue eyes and is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a black and white leopard print top with a ruffled neckline. A thin necklace with a small pendant is visible. The background is filled with lush green foliage, including large-leafed plants and a dense evergreen.

Hélène Bezuidenhout

When Reed Exhibitions started WTM Africa, I was promoting France as a tourism destination to South Africans. Reunion was a big part of my portfolio. When WTM Africa came up, I said we need to be there because we don't have an outbound travel show. Reunion was very interested, so we started out with a small stand in 2014 and we grew over the years to 54m².

The interest is two-fold: From professionals realising the importance of developing the South African market and then, of course, for the people in South Africa - the agents and tour operators - to see the interest from the clients.

This year's visit is to confirm established relationships. We know some people who have been here before.

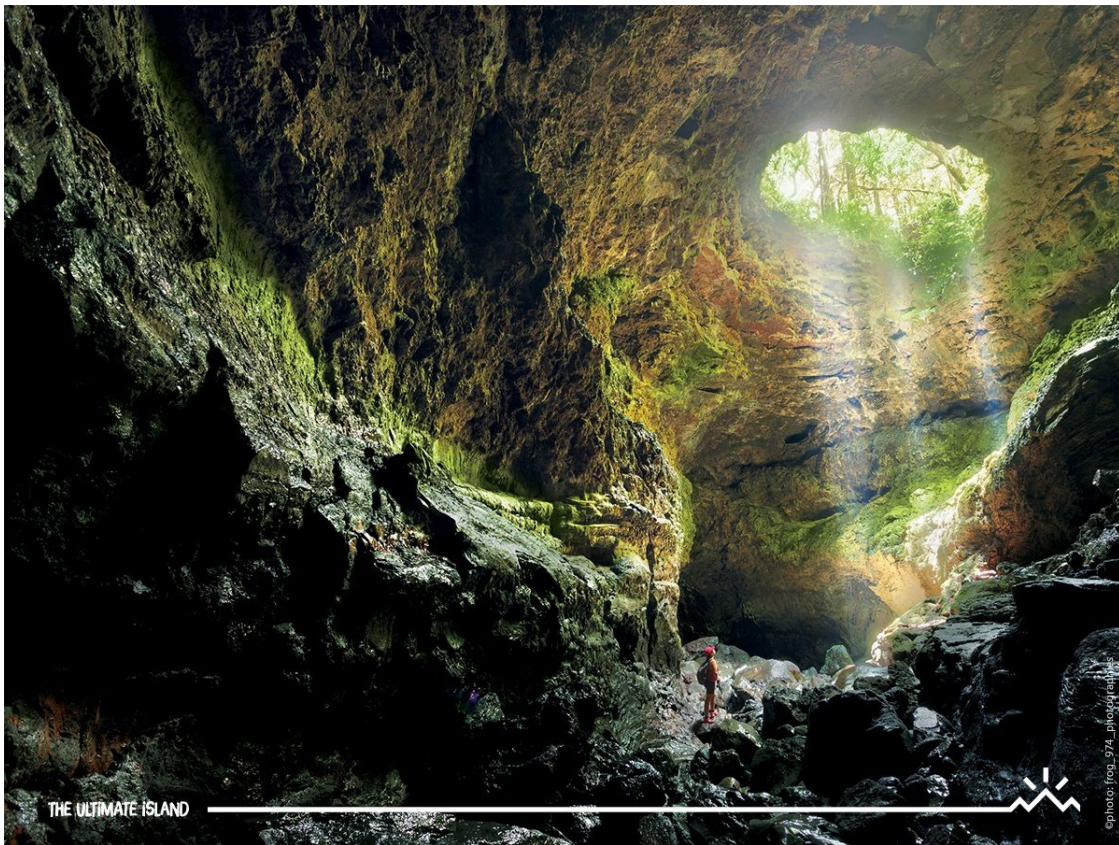
Some people have never been here before and they come with a wave of interest, and so it's also about creating new relationships, meeting new tour operators and potential clients for our people. As part of the

tourism board, my job is to promote the destination and to help the professionals of Reunion Island to sell.

After all these years, people know we're here. When we first started we faced questions like 'Where's Reunion?' - very basic questions. And now we see most people come to the stand knowing about Reunion. Now we go, not so much into the basics of the destinations, but into the experience - the experiences you can have on Reunion Island.

It's all about the X-factor - someone was talking about the X-factor and luxury. Reunion's X-factor is experience - and it might not be the typical definition of luxury - but the luxury is being on Reunion and experiencing the island.

It's so different and so diverse.



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■ ***All the island destinations have been kept together?***

This is where we want to be! All the countries in Africa are different and the Indian Ocean is exactly the same.

There is an organisation called the Vanilla Islands which promotes all the different islands. Each of the islands has its strong points and incentives for travellers to visit.

I don't consider destinations as competitors - if someone starts travelling it's great, because if they start in one place they will want to travel to another. What we need to do is to get people to travel.

■ ***What's next, after WTM Africa?***

We're very busy throughout the year because we work with the trade, the press and the consumer. We do radio shows, TV shows, and competitions. We're also training, training, training the trade as much as possible. We try to be visible on social media as much as possible, of course.



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📌 ***Anything travellers should know about?***

There are many different events taking place every year - throughout the year.

You can go at any time of the year depending on your interests. If you want to hike, you don't want to go during the rainy season.

It also depends on the volcano, which erupts regularly, so travellers can always go and have a look at that. There's no danger, and it's such an incredible show!

Reunion has extreme sports and a lot of adventure. We have all sorts of races, mountain biking, festivals - many festivals - and much more.

■ ***If you had a traveller who only had time to experience one thing, just one, what would you recommend?***

One activity?

I think, if you don't have time... take an early drive to the peak of [Maido](#) and enjoy the amazing scenery. That's what I would do!

ABOUT CARI COETZEE

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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