



SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM



Opportunities to increase positive sentiment for South Africa

The emotion attached to South Africa as a tourism destination is that of joy, despite the recent COVID 19 pandemic being a challenging period for the sector.

With the discovery of, the Omicron COVID 19 variant and the subsequent restrictions placed on travel to and from South Africa by source markets, this presented further challenges for the destination.

However, despite it all, South Africa's score based on the Tourism Sentiment Index (TSI) increased during the period 2021 to 2022.

*Tourism Sentiment Index is a consolidated measure of a destination's ability to generate positive online word-of-mouth about its tourism offering.

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South Africa rose from a score of 20 in November and December 2021 – owing to the discovery of Omicron – and increased to 23 in January 2022. This score was maintained in February 2022.

A positive Tourism Sentiment Index score is not the only victory to celebrate! South Africa’s annual overall destination sentiment score of 23, placing it among the top destinations in the world in 2021. TSI also released a list of the top 100 most loved destinations on earth in 2021 and five of South Africa’s cities made it on to the list, confirming South Africa as the premier tourism destination contender on the continent!

Knysna (19th) was among the Top 20 destinations in the world; followed by Stellenbosch (23rd), Hermanus (41st), Cape Town (54th) and Pretoria (73rd).

South African Tourism (SAT) Acting CEO Themba Khumalo celebrates this achievement, *“The pandemic has done nothing to dampen our enthusiasm in welcoming holiday-makers and business tourists to a country known for its warm hospitality and giving value for money.”* Khumalo also affirmed South Africa’s preparedness to welcome visitors *“Our new brand campaign invites the world to come to South Africa and **Live Again**. We look forward to welcoming travelers into our shores to experience our vast tourism offering.”*

TOP TRENDING TOPICS

Because the Tourism Sentiment Index score is based on online conversations, it is important to see where these conversations are happening. South Africa’s online conversations are mostly held on social media and are in reaction to news and lifestyle articles. In the month of February 2022, the top volume driver categories were

Outdoor Activities (35%) and Food + Culinary (14%), which accounted for half of the online conversation. The lowest volume driving categories were Safety (6%) and Culture + History (6%).

There were a number of topics that were the top positive sentiment drivers, namely:

TOP SENTIMENT DRIVERS		
Category	Topic	Sentiment Score
Destination Services	Weddings	54
Amenities + Attractions	Nightlife	39
Food + Culinary	Breweries	33
Amenities + Attractions	Attractions	33
Relaxation + Wellness	Beaches	31
Food + Culinary	Restaurants / Dining / Takeaway	31

TOP VOLUME DRIVERS		
Category	Topic	% of Volume
Outdoor Activities	Wildlife Viewing	15%
Food + Culinary	Restaurants / Dining / Takeaway	6%
Relaxation + Wellness	Beaches	6%
Access + Transportation	Air Travel	6%
Food + Culinary	Winery + Vineyards	5%

So what does this all mean for South Africa? How does the country leverage this standing to increase its Tourism Sentiment Index score?



CREATING RELEVANT ENGAGING CONTENT

Being one of the leading destinations on the continent, with a number of incredible offerings that generate positive sentiment amongst tourists, provides an incredible opportunity for South Africa to improve its sentiment. However, an always-on campaign approach to consistently generate an affinity to leverage on the greater volume of conversation, is necessary.

South Africa needs to increase conversations in forums and blogs where our volume of conversation is much lower compared to competitor destinations that have positioned themselves well on the same platforms.

In order to increase the joy/positive sentiment, tourism players need to increase the volume of enticing content on the high sentiment topics, as above to create talking points and “shareability”. Relevant stakeholders need to collaborate and coordinate the content they share, to amplify and concentrate on the sentiment drivers as listed above. Profiling wedding and nightlife venues, events, breweries and pubs will likely increase engagement and the number of tourists intending to visit South Africa and the specific establishments/personalities profiled.

INCREASING VISIBILITY AND SHAREABILITY

Creating content alone will not guarantee success. For content to be effective, it has to be shared on the right platforms to the right audience. Broadening the online media mix and boosting that content through paid campaigns on social media (particularly Facebook), review sites, travel blogs and forums, will increase its visibility and the volume of online conversation about the destination.

Going further and building audiences on platforms such as Reddit and Tumblr, alongside the more widely used Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Seeding more good news content will result in positive comments with emphasis on sentiment drivers. SA Tourism’s efforts towards developing a media hub to provide content in line with global news cycles will likely have a positive effect in this regard.

South Africa is an amazing destination with a lot to offer in terms of tourism and hospitality. It is important to leverage these positives in a way that bolsters the standing of the destination amongst its competitors. Curating content that highlights the country’s positive sentiment drivers, will not only raise the score of the country, but also inadvertently bring more visitors to our shores which will aid in the recovery of the tourism sector.

