

Trend Analysis Report: How Safety Perceptions Are Shaping Destination Responses to Travellers

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Q2 2026 (Jul. –Sep.)



SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM

Executive Summary

Safety and security are increasingly shaping traveller decisions, destination perceptions and tourism competitiveness. Travellers' concerns now extend beyond conventional crime to include political instability, civil unrest, health emergencies, natural hazards, transport risks, scams and the availability of reliable assistance. Consequently, destinations are moving away from reactive, policing-led responses towards integrated visitor-safety systems covering the entire travel journey.

The analysis identifies several emerging approaches, including tourism-specific police and support services, mobile safety tools, data-led hotspot management, verified safety standards, stronger venue preparedness, inclusive protection for different traveller groups and real-time risk communication. Leading destinations are also strengthening coordination between tourism authorities, law enforcement, municipalities, transport providers, tourism businesses and local communities.

For South Africa, safety remains a persistent weakness despite visitors continuing to rate their overall experience positively. Addressing this challenge requires more than reducing incidents. The sector must make its safety systems visible, accessible and trustworthy by strengthening the Tourism Monitor programme, improving coordination, protecting priority visitor routes, verifying tourism operators, using data to target hotspots and communicating risks proactively. By embedding safety across the visitor experience, South Africa can strengthen traveller confidence, protect its destination reputation and improve its global competitiveness.



Methodology

This report explores how traveller safety and security concerns are shaping destination responses globally and identifies opportunities for the South African tourism sector to strengthen visitor confidence and destination competitiveness. The analysis considers how destinations are integrating safety throughout the visitor journey through specialised assistance, partnerships, digital tools, verified tourism products, safer mobility, risk communication and emergency preparedness.

Desktop research was conducted to identify current and emerging tourism safety trends. The research drew on information from official tourism authorities, government departments, police and emergency-management agencies, international tourism organisations, destination reports and credible industry publications. Destination initiatives were compared to identify recurring approaches, emerging innovations and practices relevant to the South African tourism context.

Trend Hunter was used as an additional tool for identifying emerging trends. The platform applies a three-fold assessment matrix that evaluates the popularity, activity and freshness of each trend. Freshness refers to the relative newness of the information or initiative; activity measures the level of engagement and discussion generated, including media coverage and social-media interaction; and popularity assesses the trend's appeal relative to other topics within the same category or cluster. Key trends were selected based on a relative score of five or above, combined with a high freshness score.

The selected trends were then validated through evidence of implementation across multiple destinations or through significant policy and operational developments within individual destinations. The resulting analysis is directional rather than exhaustive and reflects the information available at the time of the research.

The Growing Importance of Traveller Safety and Security

Global safety and security conditions are becoming increasingly complex, directly influencing traveller confidence and destination competitiveness. According to the 2026 Global Peace Index, average global peacefulness deteriorated by 0.7% over the past year, marking the 12th consecutive year of decline. Although the Safety and Security domain improved marginally by 0.1%, this masked significant variation between countries. Political instability, violent demonstrations and internal conflict continued to worsen, showing that traveller concerns now extend beyond conventional crime to include broader political, social, health and environmental risks.

This trend is also reflected in South Africa. South African Tourism's International Tourism Performance Report shows that, while visitors continue to rate their overall experience highly, safety and security remain areas where there is opportunity for improvement. Safety considerations are mentioned among some visitors' less positive experiences and can influence their willingness to recommend South Africa as a destination.

The South African Tourism Brand Tracker Study shows that, while perceptions of safety and security have improved over the past two years, South Africa's safety and security score continues to lag behind its overall global desirability. The destination also performs less favourably on safety and security relative to key competitors in most markets, with the notable exceptions of Canada and the US where those destinations rank first. These findings suggest that, despite encouraging improvements, perceptions of safety remain an important factor influencing South Africa's overall destination appeal and competitiveness.

Destinations globally are therefore recognising the need to address safety concerns to protect their competitiveness. They are introducing measures such as visible visitor assistance, safer mobility, verified tourism operators, digital safety tools and real-time communication to reassure travellers and attract visitors despite heightened safety concerns.

**SAFETY IS NOW
PART OF
DESTINATION
COMPETITIVENESS**

Trends

How destinations are responding to changing traveller safety expectations



Visitor Safety Services Become More Specialised

01

THE TREND

Destinations are establishing tourism-specific police units, monitors, hotlines and assistance centres. These services help travellers overcome language barriers, unfamiliar reporting systems and uncertainty about where to seek help.

THE INSIGHT

Visible and recognisable assistance reassures visitors that their needs are understood. These services are most effective when they are multilingual and connected to the police, medical services, tourism operators and foreign missions.

DESTINATION EXAMPLES

- **Thailand:** Specialist Tourist Police, the 1155 hotline and a visitor-facing safety app.
- **India:** Tourist Police units operating across 15 states and union territories.
- **Kenya:** A Tourism Police Unit supported by a 24-hour Safety and Communication Centre.
- **Brazil:** Tourist assistance police stations, with additional deployments during events such as Carnival.
- **South Africa:** Tourism Monitors deployed at priority attractions and high-risk visitor locations.



Safety Becomes a Whole-of-Destination Responsibility

02

THE TREND

Destinations are moving away from isolated safety projects towards permanent structures that connect tourism, policing, transport, health services, municipalities and tourism businesses.

THE INSIGHT

Tourist safety cannot be delivered by the police alone. Effective destination management requires a clearly identified lead institution, shared protocols, established escalation procedures and accountability across the tourism value chain.

DESTINATION EXAMPLES

- **Brazil:** A permanent Thematic Chamber for Tourism Safety and a national Tourism Safety Programme.
- **Kenya:** A private-sector safety centre linking visitors and operators with police, hospitals and embassies.
- **South Africa:** The National Tourism Safety Forum brings together government, law enforcement and the tourism industry.
- **United States:** Times Square is managed through cooperation between police, transport authorities, sanitation services, prosecutors and business districts.
- **United Arab Emirates:** Tourism police, hotel security requirements, digital reporting and national crisis-management structures operate as a connected system.



Visitor Assistance Becomes Mobile and Always Available

03

THE TREND

Safety assistance is moving onto travellers' mobile devices through SOS functions, GPS location sharing, live chat, multilingual hotlines, incident reporting and location-based warnings.

THE INSIGHT

Digital tools reduce the time between an incident and receiving help. However, their value depends on visitor awareness, ease of use and integration with an operational emergency response system.

DESTINATION EXAMPLES

- **Thailand:** The Tourist Police app provides GPS-enabled SOS assistance, live chat, reporting and alerts in five languages.
- **Japan:** The Safety Tips app provides international visitors with warnings about earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic activity, severe weather and heat.
- **India:** The 24-hour 1363 tourism helpline provides assistance in 12 languages.
- **Kenya:** The Tourism Safety and Communication Centre offers a 24-hour contact point and verified information.
- **Australia:** AusAlert is intended to provide a nationally consistent emergency-warning system from October 2026.



Safety Becomes a Visible Booking Attribute

04

THE TREND

Accreditation, safety standards, inspections and trust marks are making it possible for travellers to identify verified tourism businesses before booking.

THE INSIGHT

Safety is becoming part of the tourism product. Visitors increasingly expect proof that accommodation, attractions and operators meet recognised standards rather than relying on broad destination assurances.

DESTINATION EXAMPLES

- **Thailand:** The Trusted Thailand Stamp covers accommodation, attractions, restaurants, recreation, secure payments and visitor communication.
- **Australia:** Quality Tourism Accreditation provides recognised assurance that tourism businesses meet professional standards.
- **Kenya:** Tourism Regulatory Authority licensing helps visitors distinguish compliant operators.
- **China:** Announced and undercover inspections assess fire, electrical, transport, water-safety and consumer-protection risks.
- **United Arab Emirates:** Abu Dhabi applies technical security standards to hotels and event venues.



Safety Operations Become Data-Led and Place-Specific

05

THE TREND

Destinations are using incident reports, visitor complaints, surveillance, artificial intelligence and crowd data to identify risk hotspots and deploy resources more precisely.

THE INSIGHT

Safety interventions are becoming more targeted by location, time and visitor flow. Technology can improve prevention and response, but it must be supported by privacy safeguards, trained personnel and measurable operational outcomes.

DESTINATION EXAMPLES

- **Thailand:** Safe Tourist Zones combine patrols, multilingual assistance and AI-enabled cameras.
- **Brazil:** Rio's summer operation deployed more than 1,000 personnel, drones and approximately 200 cameras along the beachfront.
- **China:** Reservations, timed entry and capacity monitoring are used to manage pressure at popular attractions.
- **India:** Women's safety projects use risk mapping, CCTV, lighting, helpdesks and control rooms.
- **United States:** Tourism districts use location-specific policing, incident reporting and partnerships with local businesses.



Destination Safety Expands Beyond Crime

06

THE TREND

Safety planning increasingly covers climate events, extreme heat, disease, beaches, wildlife, remote travel and adventure activities alongside conventional crime.

THE INSIGHT

Travellers assess the full range of risks associated with a destination and its experiences. Safety information must therefore be adapted to the location, season and activity rather than communicated through generic national advice.

DESTINATION EXAMPLES

- **Australia:** Beach safe, park alerts and guidance on fires, floods, road travel and remote areas.
- **Japan:** Multilingual alerts covering earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, severe weather and heat.
- **Kenya:** Tourism-sector health updates provide verified information when regional health events may affect perceptions.
- **China:** Seasonal notices address severe weather, geological hazards, water activities and congestion.
- **Brazil:** The national programme incorporates safety standards for adventure and ecotourism.
- **United States:** National Park Service alerts, ranger services and search-and-rescue systems support nature-based tourism.



The Entire Visitor Journey Becomes a Safety Priority

07

THE TREND

Destinations are extending safety interventions beyond attractions to include transport hubs, roads, walking routes, public spaces and the journey between accommodation and tourism experiences.

THE INSIGHT

A visitor may feel safe at an attraction but unsafe while travelling to or from it. Destination safety must therefore be designed as a continuous corridor from the point of arrival to accommodation, attractions and night-time activities.

DESTINATION EXAMPLES

- **India:** Tourism projects include CCTV, lighting, railings, signage, queues, ramps and last-mile infrastructure.
- **Thailand:** Tourist Police operations cover airports, transport hubs, marine activities and transport-related scams.
- **United Kingdom:** British Transport Police provides visible rail patrols and the 61016 text-reporting service.
- **Brazil:** Rio's summer operation integrates policing, traffic management, transit services and lifesaving.
- **Australia:** Visitor guidance covers road safety, long-distance travel, remote areas and regulated aviation experiences.



Safety Is Designed for Different Traveller Needs

08

THE TREND

Destinations are replacing one-size-fits-all safety measures with interventions designed for women, children, older visitors, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ travellers and visitors who do not speak the local language.

THE INSIGHT

Different travellers experience risk differently. Inclusive safety requires changes to infrastructure, staff training, transport, communication and reporting channels—not only more general safety messaging.

DESTINATION EXAMPLES

- **India:** Safe Tourism Destinations for Women funds lighting, CCTV, women's helpdesks, safer transport and risk mapping.
- **Brazil:** The national programme prioritises women's safety, child protection, anti-discrimination and consumer rights.
- **United Kingdom:** Ask for Angela allows people who feel unsafe to discreetly request assistance at participating venues.
- **Australia:** Multilingual emergency, health and beach-safety information supports international visitors.
- **United States:** Accessibility requirements and location-specific information support safer participation by travellers with disabilities.



Digital Trust Becomes Part of Destination Security

09

THE TREND

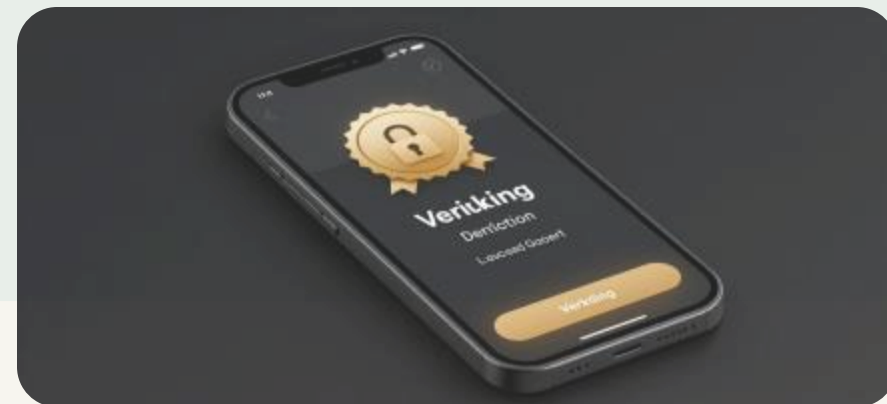
Destinations are treating fake bookings, payment fraud, forced shopping, misleading tours and unlicensed providers as tourism safety risks.

THE INSIGHT

Safety begins before the traveller arrives. A fraudulent booking or unsafe provider can damage confidence in the entire destination, making consumer protection and digital trust important components of destination management.

DESTINATION EXAMPLES

- **Thailand:** Trusted Thailand includes secure-payment criteria, while enforcement targets scams and unlicensed services.
- **China:** Authorities act against forced shopping, ultra-low-price tours and misconduct by agencies and guides.
- **Australia:** Scamwatch warns travellers about fake accommodation, booking and payment scams.
- **United States:** Consumer agencies and law enforcement address travel fraud, identity theft and payment risks.
- **India:** Licensing, grievance systems and tourism helplines support verification and consumer redress.



Venues Shift from Security Presence to Preparedness

10

THE TREND

Major attractions, events and tourism venues are introducing formal plans for capacity management, evacuation, lockdown, emergency communication and coordinated incident response.

THE INSIGHT

Visible guards and screening are no longer considered sufficient. Tourism venues are increasingly expected to demonstrate that they can prevent, manage and recover from serious incidents.

DESTINATION EXAMPLES

- **United Kingdom:** Martyn's Law establishes a tiered preparedness framework for qualifying premises and events, although substantive duties were still awaiting commencement as of August 2026.
- **India:** Pilgrimage and festival sites use barriers, route planning, public-address systems, medical posts and control rooms.
- **China:** Attractions use reservations, timed entry, visitor limits and temporary closures.
- **Brazil:** Carnival and summer operations combine policing, traffic control, child protection and crowd management.
- **United Arab Emirates:** Hotels and event venues are subject to technical security and screening standards.



Real-Time Communication Becomes Confidence Management

11

THE TREND

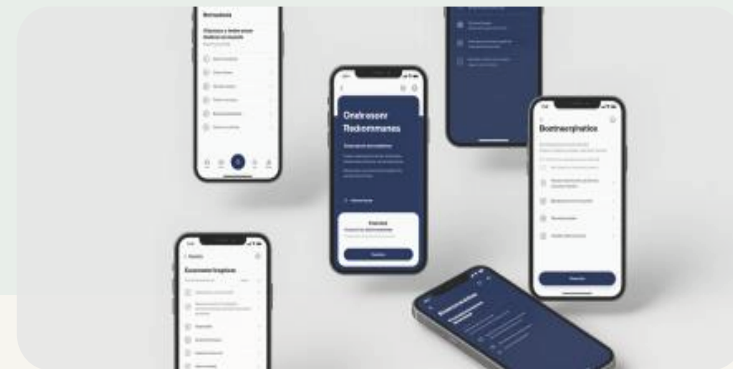
Destinations are providing more localised, multilingual and timely safety information during health events, natural disasters, security incidents and service disruptions.

THE INSIGHT

Destinations cannot eliminate every risk, but they can demonstrate that risks are understood and managed. Specific and actionable information builds more trust than broad claims that a destination is safe.

DESTINATION EXAMPLES

- **Kenya:** Health and travel updates provide destination-specific context when regional events create concern.
- **Thailand:** Safety programmes are supported by situation updates and multilingual communication to source markets.
- **United States:** IPAWS, local alerts and National Park Service notices provide geographically relevant warnings.
- **United Arab Emirates:** Visit Dubai provides current travel advisories and visitor information through WhatsApp.
- **Australia:** AusAlert is intended to create a nationally consistent warning experience.
- **China:** Seasonal notices warn travellers about weather, geological hazards, water activities and congestion.



Strategic Implications for South Africa's Tourism Sector



Strategic Implications for South Africa's Tourism Sector

South Africa has made progress in addressing tourist safety and security concerns. Key initiatives include the National Tourism Safety Forum, which brings together government, law enforcement and the tourism industry, as well as the deployment of Tourism Monitors at airports, priority attractions and high-risk visitor locations. These measures provide visible assistance, improve access to safety information, support faster emergency responses and strengthen visitor protection during peak travel periods. The industry should consider the strategic implications below to further strengthen safety and security across the destination.

Strategic Implications for South Africa's Tourism Sector

- **Create a coordinated visitor-safety system:** Strengthen collaboration between tourism authorities, law enforcement, municipalities, transport providers, tourism businesses and local communities.
 - **Make assistance visible and accessible:** Establish recognisable, multilingual support across tourism hotspots through Tourism Monitors, dedicated contact channels and digital safety tools.
 - **Protect the complete visitor journey:** Extend safety interventions beyond attractions to airports, transport hubs, tourism routes, accommodation areas and night-time precincts.
- **Build trust through verified tourism products:** Integrate safety, emergency preparedness and secure payment practices into quality standards for tourism grading and accredited tour operators, while increasing awareness and visibility of these standards among both tourism businesses and travellers
 - **Use data to target priority hotspots:** Combine incident reports, visitor complaints and tourism-flow data to identify risks and deploy resources where they will have the greatest impact.
 - **Communicate risk proactively:** Provide timely, location-specific information that explains what has happened, where visitors can safely travel and how they can obtain assistance.

Strategic takeaway: South Africa's competitive advantage will depend not only on reducing safety incidents, but also on making its safety systems visible, responsive and trustworthy.

Sources

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Thank You

Safety, trust and destination competitiveness



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