

South Africa: MICE Sector Is Taking the Greener Road

Creating travel incentives and options that are green is important in the modern tourism industry, especially as businesses try to appeal to environmentally-conscious travelers. This concept is however becoming even more important in South Africa as their MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events) industry tries to deal with a slow increase in business tourism.



The problems of green business tourism in South Africa

South Africa has had some issues lately regarding tourism and economics – their recovery from the recent global recession being a slow one that was given a much needed boost by the 2010 World Cup – and tourism trends have changed significantly, with many visitors preferring to make more frequent, shorter trips than local businesses are used to. One of the many issues hitting the MICE sector is the image of the country in regards to green issues and their environmental reputation. South Africa is seen as being quite a way behind European counterparts when it comes to transportation, renewable energy, environmental programmes and the local, social impact of their businesses.

There are many factors working against the country that could hinder any attempt to seem like a great green destination for foreign business tourists: the state of the transit systems, a sense of social inequality that works against the values of eco-tourism, conference centers with inefficient energy supplies and management and the necessity of long haul flights, which severely increases a traveler's carbon footprint before they even step foot in the country. Thankfully for the MICE sector, there is now a greater awareness of the problems that are being faced and a desire to make the sector greener and more attractive.



So what solutions are being put into place to resolve these issues?

The biggest obstacle that the business travel and events sector has to contend with is showcasing its new and successful environmentally-friendly ventures to the world and appealing the foreign markets that, arguably, have a much more established and finer grasp on green trends. Initiatives to improve energy consumption and use renewable sources like solar and wind are an admirable start – one that is slowly taking shape – but it is the new approach to social impacts and local procurement that is most inspiring in this grander scheme.

Social investments at South African conferences and events are growing in popularity because they help to improve the perception of the country in the eyes of their greener clients. Examples of this include commissioning gift bags from local merchants, using small-scale local catering and raising awareness for other grassroots sectors. James Seymour of the Durban Kwa-Zulu Natal Convention Bureau is one man fully behind this proposal who encourages 'all of the events that we [the Bureau] support to take on environmental and social responsibility components on projects...and to have local crafters exhibit at their meetings'.



What positive changes and results have been seen thanks to these ambitious solutions?

Progress is slow and steady but there are a number of examples of green initiatives in South Africa and positive changes that should please green-minded clients, including the transforming public transportation systems, conscientious new forums and eco-friendly festivals. The integrated rapid transit systems of Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg are steadily improving – with Durban looking to add a new rail link to the King Shaka International Airport to increase access and convenience for delegations and visitors – the Event Greening Forum has been established to promote green business tourism and events and the 2012 Rocking the Daisies music festival was highly commended for its creative and successful use of a “leave no trace” policy.

Green solutions for the MICE sector in South Africa are beginning to find their feet.

It is clear that all these conference centers, forums and other enterprises within this MICE sector are just starting out on a long and bumpy road but many of them seem to be starting as they mean to go on. Making South Africa's business tourism sector greener is not something that can happen overnight but, as long as it sticks to the solutions mentioned above and remains focused on the problems it has to overcome and the recent successes, the country should be able to please its green-minded clients in years to come.

Date: 2013-09-30

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-south-african-mice-sector-is-turning-green-article2205>