

TOURISM SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA FORCED TO CHOOSE RENEWABLE ENERGY



South Africa as well.

For the past two decades, South Africans have struggled with rolling power cuts known as "load shedding." They are a result of Eskom's deteriorating infrastructure and over-reliance on shabby coal-fired power plants, the state power company. In 2023, the situation has worsened, with some areas experiencing power cuts for up to 10 hours a day. It naturally impacts the tourism sector in

This crisis ripples through every aspect of the country's economy, including its vital tourism sector. Tourism significantly contributes to the South African economy, with over 10 million foreign visitors in 2019. **The sector contributed up to 6.4% of gross domestic product, providing 1.5 million jobs and 9.3% of total employment.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially reduced the number of visitors to the country. While visitors return, this sector's financial recovery and viability remain hampered by the electricity crisis. Tourism operators must shift towards renewable electricity generation to keep their businesses running. There are three reasons for this.

Providing consistent electricity to guests is essential for any tourism business.

Renewable energy is less environmentally harmful than coal-based generation and emits fewer greenhouse gases.

Customers are increasingly aware of environmental concerns and demand more sustainable tourism products, and they adjust their travel choices accordingly.

Fighting the Crisis

The tourism sector in South Africa has taken steps towards environmental sustainability. The government has published a Tourism Environmental Implementation Plan to encourage tourism establishments to participate in renewable electricity generation and savings. One of the initiatives included in the plan is the Green Tourism Incentive Programme, which supports small tourism businesses by providing free energy and water audits. This can lead to improved efficiency and the introduction of subsidized renewable energy systems. So far, the program has funded 111 renewable energy projects. The incentive covers approximately two-thirds of the investment, while individual businesses finance the remaining third.

Nature-based tourism is a significant part of South African tourism, and South African National Parks, which manage the national parks, has taken steps towards sustainability. It has installed solar PV panels in 19 of its 21 parks and implemented other low-carbon strategies and climate adaptation plans.

What Should Be Done?

While there are some examples of successful green initiatives in South Africa, they are still limited in size and scope. Most innovations towards sustainable energy generation have been self-funded by

businesses as a survival strategy to cope with power cuts. Although the shift towards renewable electricity has the added benefits of reducing greenhouse gases and air pollution, it has been chiefly a coincidence.

A broader approach is required to transition towards a more sustainable tourism system. This would involve providing access to finance on favorable terms and facilitating the transition to renewable energy sources. This would also ensure that small businesses can adopt renewable electricity, leading to a system change that decouples the tourism sector from coal-based electricity.

The shift towards green energy in tourism is already happening in developed economies in Europe. Turkey is another country setting an encouraging example with its sustainable tourism program. Solar PV panels are widely used by businesses and households alike.

By transitioning the tourism sector in South Africa to renewable energy, the country can also be part of this transition. However, including small and community-based tourism players in this transition is essential. While tourism should play its part, other economic sectors should also contribute.

Developing an enabling environment for sustainability transitions in South Africa requires supportive policies. **The state and its institutions must take greater responsibility and accountability to advance the social sustainability of energy policies.** One way to achieve this is by making the Green Tourism Incentive Programme more accessible to nationwide tourism enterprises.

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